

FOLK TALES OF BENGAL

GEETA MAJUMDAR



STERLING

STERLING PUBLISHERS PVT LTD
NEW DELHI-16 **JULLUNDUR-3**

**FOLK TALES OF
BENGAL**

STERLING PUBLISHERS PVT LTD
695, Model Town **Jullundur-3**
AB/9, Safdarjang Enclave **New Delhi-16**

First Edition 1960

PRINTED IN INDIA

**Published by Shri S.K. Ghai, Managing Director, Sterling Publishers (P) Ltd.
and Printed at Kapur Printing Press, Delhi.**

GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Folklore in the different parts of India is a rich legacy for us. While researches in ancient and modern history have been directed in recent decades more to the succession of kings and political shifts not much notice has been paid to the culture, complex traditions and social beliefs of the common people. The sociologists have also to pay a good deal of attention to the customs and beliefs of the people and changes therein through the ages. They have rather neglected the study of folklore which is a reliable index to the background of the people. There has always been an easy mobility of folklore through pilgrimages, *melas* and fairs. The wandering minstrels, *sadhus* and *fakirs* have also disseminated them. People of the North visiting the temples of the South and *vice versa* carry their folk-tales, songs, riddles and proverbs with them and there is an inconspicuous integration. The *dharamsalas*, inns and the *Chattis* (places where the pilgrims rest and intermingle) worked as the clearing house for the folk tales, traditional songs and riddles. That is why we find a somewhat common pattern in folk literature of different regions. The same type of folk tale will be found in Kashmir and in Kerala with slight regional variation. These stories were passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth before they came to be reduced to writing.

Folklorists have different approaches to the appreciation of folklore. Max Muller has interpreted the common pattern in folk literature as evidence of nature-myths. Sir L. Gomme thought that a historical approach is the best for the study of folklore. But Frazer would rather encourage a commonsense approach and to him, old and popular folk literature is mutually interdependent and satisfies the basic curiosities and instincts of man. That folklore is a vital element in a living culture has been underlined in recent years by scholars like Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown.

It is unfortunate that the study of folklore in India is of very recent origin. This is all the more regrettable because the *Panchatantra* stories which had their origin in Bihar had spread through

various channels almost throughout the world. As late as in 1859, T. Benfey had held that there is an unmistakable stamp of Indian origin in most of the fairy tales of Europe. The same stories with different twists or complexes have come back to us through Grimm and Aesop and the retold stories are greedily swallowed by our children. That India has neglected a proper study of the beautiful motifs of our folk tales is seen in the fact that the two large volumes of the dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend published by Messrs Funk and Wagnalls and Company of New York have given a very inadequate reference to India.

What is the secret of the fascination of the folk tales that the old, the young and children are kept enthralled by their recitals? The same story is often repeated but does not lose its interest. The secret is the satisfaction that our basic curiosity finds in the folk tales. The folk tales through phantasies, make-believe and complacent understanding help primitive man to satisfy his curiosity about the mysteries of the world and particularly the very many inexplicable phenomena of nature around him. We have an element of primitiveness in our mind in spite of the advancement of science around us. Even a scientist finds great delight in the fairy tales of the moon being attacked as the origin of the lunar eclipse. Through the folk tales man exercised his once-limited vision and somehow or other we would like to retain the limited vision even when we have grown up. The advancement in science can never replace the folk tales. On the other hand, folk tales have helped the scientific curiosity of men. In spite of the scientific explanation as to why earthquakes take place, the old, the young and children would still be delighted to be told that the world rests on the hood of a great snake and when the snake is tired with its weight, it shakes the hood and there is an earthquake. Among the Mundas, an aboriginal tribe in Bihar, there is a wonderful explanation of the constellation Orion. The sword and belt of Orion, the Mundas imagined, form their appropriate likeness to the plough and plough-share which the supreme *Sing Bonga* God first shaped in the heavens and then taught people on earth how to use the plough and the plough-share. It is further said in the Munda folk tale that while the *Sing Bonga* was shaping the plough and the plough-share with a chisel and a hammer he

observed a dove hatching its eggs at a little distance. The *Sing Bonga* threw his hammer at the dove to bag the game. He missed his mark and the hammer went over the dove's head and hung on a tree. The hammer corresponds to the Pleiads which resemble a hammer. The Aldebaran is the dove and the other stars of the Hyades are the eggs of the dove. Any illiterate Munda boy will unmistakably point out these star groups.

Weather and climate have their own stories and are often connected with particular stages of the crops. The wet season and the hottest month are intimately associated with the ripening of crops or the blossoming of trees or the frequency of dust-storms and stories are woven round them. But nothing is more satisfying as a folk story than the explanation of the phases of the stars, moon and the sun. A Munda would point out the milky way as the *Gai Hora* i.e. the path of the cows. The *Sing Bonga* God leads his cows every day along this path—the dusky path on the sky is due to the dust raised by the herd. The dust raised by the cows sends down the rains. A story of this type can never fail to sustain its interest in spite of all the scientific explanation of the astral bodies.

The “why and therefore” of the primitive mind tried to seek an answer in the surrounding animal and plant kingdom. Animals are grouped into different categories according to their intelligence and other habits. The fox is always sly while the cow is gentle. The lion and the tiger have a majestic air while the horse is swift, sleek and intelligent. The slow-going elephant does not forget its attendant nor does he forget a man that teases him. Monkeys are very close to man. The peacock is gay while the crow is shrewd. The tortoise is slow-going but sure-footed. The hare is swift but apt to laze on the road. The primitive mind has enough intelligence to decipher the inherent characteristics of the common animals he meets. Similarly, when he sees a large and shady peepal tree he naturally regards it as the abode of the sylvan god. The thick jungle with its trees and foliage is known to be frequented by thieves and dacoits. Any solitary hut in the heart of the forest must be associated with someone unscrupulous or uncanny. These ideas are commonly woven into stories and through them the primitive mind seeks to satisfy the eternal why

and how of the mind. Folk literature is often crude and even grotesque. The stories of the witches and the ogres come in this category. There is nothing to be surprised at that. They reflect the particular stage of the development of the human mind and also are a projection of the beliefs and fads of the mind. Scientific accuracy should never be looked for in folk tales although folk tales are a very good reflex of the social developments of a particular time.

It is enough if the basic ideas regarding the animal and plant kingdom still satisfy that the donkey is dense or stupid and the snake typifies slyness and the fox is deceitful. These ideas repeated in ancient folk tales have stood the test of time and this would show that the primitive mind was not foolish or credulous. The very idea that the folk tales have woven man, nature, animal and plant creation together shows the great flight of imagination and singular development of mind. Introduction of moral lessons or any dogma was not done as an after-thought but came in as a very natural development.

The last source of the folk tales is human society itself. The elemental moorings that are at the root of human society are sought to be illustrated in folk tales. The day-to-day life of the common man finds its full depiction in the folk tales. Parental love, family happiness, children's adventurous habits, love and fear of the unknown, greed etc. are some of the usual themes of folk tales. The common man yearns for riches and comforts he cannot usually look for. He dreams of riches, princes, kingdoms etc. and finds satisfaction in stories and fantasy. Men love gossip and scandal. Women cannot keep secrets, children will love their parents, a mother-in-law will always think the daughter-in-law needs to be told what to do—these are some of the basic ideas that make up much of our daily life. The folk tales are woven round them and whether fantastic or with a moral undertone they only reflect the daily chores, tears and joys of the common man.

Unknowingly, the folklorists bring in the religious customs, beliefs, food habits, modes of dress, superstitions etc. and thereby leave a picture of the culture-complex of the region and its people. A tribal story does not picture a king riding a white big foaming horse followed by hundreds of other horsemen going for a *shikar*.

In a tribal story the Raja will be found cutting the grass and bringing back a stack of it to feed his cows, but a folk tale more current in urban areas will have large palaces, liveried-servants, ministers and courtiers in the king's court. All this only means that the time and the venue of the origin of the stories are widely different. It is here that the sociologists and the anthropologists come in useful. As life is different in rural and urban areas or is chequered with goodness or badness in the world so is folk literature diversified, as it must be, being a replica of life.

It is a pity that these beautiful folk tales in India were almost on the point of disappearance when a few pioneers mostly consisting of foreign missionaries and European scholars looked into them and made compilations in different parts of India. Our present run of grandmothers know very little of them. The professional story-tellers who were very dearly sought after by the old and the young, not to speak of the children, have almost completely disappeared from India. The film industry and the film songs pose a definite threat to folklore.

The Sterling Publishers are to be congratulated for launching the project of publishing a compilation of 20 volumes consisting of the folk tales of different regions. The work has been entrusted to specially selected writers who have an intimate knowledge of their regions. The regional complex of the stories has been sought to be preserved as far as possible. The stories have an elemental involvement about them and they are such as are expected to appeal to the child and its parents. We expect the reader of the folk tales of the particular region to feel after reading the stories, that he has enjoyed a whiff of the air of that area. We want him to have an idea of how Kashmiri folks retire in wintry nights with the *Kangri* under the folds of their clothes to enjoy a gossip and how they enjoy their highly spiced meaty food. We want him to appreciate the splash of the colours of the sari and the flowers that are a must in Tamil Nadu. We want him to know the stories that are behind some of the famous temples in the South such as the Kanjeevaram temple. We want him to know the story regarding the construction of the famous Konarak temple. We want him to enjoy the stories of the heroes of Gujarat, Punjab and Rajasthan in their particular roles. We want the reader to have an idea of

the peace and quiet of a hut in the lap of the Kumaon hills. We want the reader to enjoy some of the folk tales of Bengal and Bihar that have found wings in other parts of India and to appreciate the village life with its *Alpana* and *Bratas*. At the same time we want the reader to appreciate the customs and manners of the Santhals, Garos, and the other tribes inhabiting Nefa and Assam.

A set of twenty volumes of Folk Tales of the different regions of India by selected authors is an ambitious programme. Folk Tales have great impact in bringing in national integration of the country. A Keralite will see a pattern of familiarity while reading the folk tales of Bengal, Assam or Kashmir. Maharashtra and Orissa will come nearer to each other through ties of folk tales. The reader will feel that he is at one with his brother or sister elsewhere. A spread of knowledge of the social patterns of the different regions is a pre-requisite for national integration. It can be modestly claimed that these Folk Tales series will be of great help in that direction. The Publishers want to have a miniature India in these 20 Volumes.

The authors have to be thanked for their interest in the work. I am sure that they have enjoyed the assignment. It is hoped the books will be found useful and interesting to the public. I have no hesitation in saying that the stories of the different areas do make out a miniature India. It is hoped the reader will enjoy the stories and will come to know more of the region and its people.

New Delhi.

P.C. Roy Chaudhury

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In Bengali there is a beautiful word for folk tales for children—*Rup-Katha*. The translation “beautiful imaginative stories” fails to do full justice—*Rup-Katha* proceeds as an improvised narration which acquires a vivid shape and creates a dazzling world of fantasy through its own art of narration. The events are told in such a simple interesting way, that though they may be quite absurd, the manner in which these events are narrated, immediately catches the listener’s imagination and gently takes him to that world of un-reality in a happy, absorbed mood. These stories are coming down from generation to generation. But they take on a new colour, a new life, as a grandmother starts telling the stories to her fond grand children. A clever story teller, particularly of *Rup-Katha*, minds both the listener’s mood and the occasion. For, these stories may have to be told to a quiet lonesome child; a boisterous young gentleman bent upon mischief, because he is cross with the world as the mother had to leave him alone for an hour or two; or a teenage girl who has to be comforted by the granny. Like the listener, the time may differ. The narration must suit the drowsy bed-time, or the long restful hours after the midday meal; sometime the story teller’s real purpose is to amuse the child so that he eats well and enjoys the food—or is it the hateful milk which takes an hour to drink? And in the world of fancy, our children meet nymphs which float on water, flying horses which go past mountains, trees which open up to provide a night’s shelter, ripples in hill streams turned into stones, seven *champa* blossoms which are really seven little brothers, and then, of course, the old woman who is the mother of the Moon God. As in the stories of Greece and other lands, youths go out when they are still very young in search of adventure or for avenging some wrong, and perform heroic deeds which are truly miraculous.

Alas! as we grow up this wonderful world of light and colour, beauty and adventure vanishes. Who notices when the dew melts in sunshine? But it was a joy to try to retell the stories, to recapit-

tulate what one heard as a child from the granny, or even one's mother, when she did not have too much work in hand; also to remember the stories, of the singing bird in a golden cage and other fascinating accounts in many excellent books which it was a treasure to possess. The author's efforts will not be entirely in vain if some of the folk tales in this book are found interesting.

New Delhi

Geeta Majumdar

CONTENTS

1. THE STORY OF SEVEN BROTHERS AND A SISTER	...	17
2. THE NEEDLE KING	...	25
3. THE STORY OF KIRANMALA	...	35
4. THE STORY OF PRINCE RUPKUMAR	...	52
5. THE STORY OF SUKHU AND DUKHU	...	61
6. THE STORY OF ITU-GOD	...	73
7. THE STORY OF SHREEMANTA	...	86
8. THE STORY OF BASANTA AND HEMANTA	...	94
9. THE STORY OF THE GOOD TIGER	...	113

THE STORY OF THE SEVEN BROTHERS AND A SISTER

THERE was a King who had seven Queens. All of them were pretty—but the youngest was the prettiest. She had a very kind nature also. She could never dream of harming any body, or doing evil in any way. So she was greatly liked by all—except her six co-wives—who were mighty jealous of her.

The King loved his youngest Queen very much. Amongst the seven wives, he was most fond of this youngest one. Now this was a sore point for the other six Queens. Their dislike and jealousy for the youngest Queen increased as the King loved her more and more.

Anyway—days were passing smoothly in this way. The youngest Queen got quite accustomed to her co-wives' ways. She did not mind their occasional harsh words or taunts at times. She used to smile such unpleasant things away and continued to be friendly to the other Queens in spite of their unfriendly behaviour.

None of the seven Queens had any child. The King used to feel very sorry about this and the Queens felt worse. But since nothing could be done, they endured this sorrow silently and prayed to God for luck.

Suddenly it seemed that God had taken notice of the prayer. The youngest Queen, Sulata, was expecting. The King was over-joyed by this happy news. His affection for Sulata grew even more. He was always

looking after her comforts and attending to her wishes. He also gave her the most of his company.

We can easily imagine how the minds of the other six Queens worked. Even as it was, they had always been jealous of Sulata for every thing—particularly for being the King's favourite. Now it seemed that she was destined to have best of every thing in life. Very soon she would be a mother—and they, much as they longed to be so themselves, were not fortunate enough to be in that happy position. Surely this was a great injustice on the part of God. And over and above every thing, the amount of fuss the King was making on that silly girl, they thought, was intolerable.

They were green with jealousy and were determined to take revenge if some how they ever got a chance.

When the time for arrival of the baby came, the King hastened to summon the best mid-wife and a helper from the locality. But the eldest Queen Premlata went to the King and told him that it would not be necessary to call anybody from outside. After all there were six of them, and surely they can manage to look after Sulata among themselves. The King need not worry. She would take charge of the situation.

The King was quite relieved by her assurance. So he impressed her that all possible care must be taken of Sulata, and the King must be immediately informed as soon as the child was born. Premlata readily agreed to that, and went back to look after Sulata.

Once back in the labour room, she called the five other Queens and bolted the door strongly. She pretended to be very sympathetic to Sulata as well as very happy that she would have the child very soon. Poor Sulata in her innocence believed her and relied on her completely.

Gradually the time came. But lo and behold ! There was not one baby—but eight of them—one after another ! The first seven were all boys—the last one was a girl. All the six Queens were so envious of Sulata.

As soon as the last baby arrived, Premlata hid the eight of them in a big *Gamocha* (Towel) and ran towards the back yard. There she dug a big hole swiftly and buried all the eight babies alive. Then she hurried back to the labour room. On the way back, she picked up some rats, a kitten and a newly born pup from the back yard. She deposited those animals in a basket and put it near Sulata. Then she rang a bell which meant the King was called.

The King rushed with a happy smile on his face. He was almost sure that it must be a boy. But even if it was a girl, he would be happy just the same, he thought.

Premlata was waiting for him at the door of the labour room. She made a face full of sorrow and disappointment, and showed the King the basket, full of rats and kitten and a pup. The King's disappointment was beyond measure. He asked furiously, "Is this all?" Premlata said in an innocent voice, "Yes, my Lord, that is all. What shall I do with them." The angry king answered, "Bury them all at once." Then he went back and did not even want to see Sulata.

When Sulata opened her eyes, the first thing she asked, "Didi, where are my babies?" Premlata replied in a sad tone, "I am very sorry, they were not human babies at all. There was a kitten, and a pup and the rest were rats. I showed them to the King who ordered to bury them all at once. So I had to carry out his orders and could not keep them for you to have a look at them."

Poor Sulata was so shocked that she fainted away. Premlata, along with the five others, relished the situation and marvelled at her success.

The King returned to the court and passed an order that such an unlucky queen like Sulata should not even be sheltered in the Palace. So let her leave the Palace as soon as she was fit enough to walk and live anywhere amidst the commoners.

When the eldest queen Premlata heard about the King's order, she was over-joyed. She hurried to announce it to Sulata who was too ill and too sad at that time. Sulata could hardly believe her ears. It took her sometime to realise that the King could suddenly turn so hard against her--especially at such a time when she needed his sympathy most. She wept bitterly and cursed her evil luck.

As soon as Sulata became fit enough to stand and walk, Premlata carried out the King's order. She got her turned out of the Palace. She never allowed a chance to Sulata to see the King even once. Premlata's fear was that the King might feel sorry for Sulata if he met her again and cancel his order to turn her out of the Palace.

In a shabby old sari, her hair unoiled and undone, in an utterly weak state of health and a mind full of misery, Sulata went out of the Palace, weeping silently.

Days passed as usual. But in the Palace, soon there was no trace left of happiness. The King remained silent and gloomy. He stopped seeing any of his queens. The whole city became as if dead. Even the trees stopped flowering.

Suddenly, one morning, the King's gardener discovered some beautiful flowers had bloomed on a Champa tree. He was very happy to notice the lovely flowers and decided to pluck them immediately and offer to the King. The King would be very happy to see such magnificent fresh flowers.

So the gardener, a basket in his hand, went to pluck the flowers. He stood under the tall Champa tree and raised his hand to reach a flower on the nearest branch. The branch was quite within his reach. But as soon as his hand came near the stalk, the flower went up higher just exceeding the reach of the gardener. The poor gardener became so surprised, in fact quite afraid to see such unusual occurrence. He thought perhaps some evil spirit had started dwelling on the tree. He must report to the King.

Just then, a voice from the top-most flower started singing in a human voice:

"We would not, would not give any flower. We would rise up higher and higher. Let only the King come, and then we would give flowers."

The gradener was so shocked at this incident, that he immediately ran to the King's court. Reaching near the King's throne, he begged with folded hands in a panting voice—"Oh Maharaj, do please come immediately and see how our old Champa tree is behaving in a very odd way."

The King felt rather inquisitive, and followed the *mali* (gardener) to the garden. When he reached the back-yard garden where the Champa tree stood, he was delighted to see eight lovely flowers on its branches. At once the King lifted his hand to pluck the nearest of the lot. But no sooner had the King stretched his hand than did the flower start rising high till it went beyond the King's reach. This time also, a beautiful voice from the tree top sang, "We would not, would not give flowers, we would rise higher and higher up, let the King's eldest Queen come, and then only we would give flowers."

The King was really at a loss. Intrigued by the extraordinary situation, he sent for the eldest queen at once. The eldest queen arrived with alarm in her heart, since she remembered very well where she had buried alive those lovely eight babies of poor Sulata.

The flowers behaved in the same way with her too, as they had with the King and the *mali*. The same voice sang the same tune, and this time it asked for the King's, second queen—the 'Mejo rani'.

In this way, under the King's command, one by one, all the six queens had to come there, as the voice went on demanding the presence of each of them, one queen after another. Lastly it sang, "We would not, would not give any flower. We would climb up higher and higher, let the King's youngest Queen come; and only then we will give flowers."

Now—that came as a shock not only to the six queens, but also to the King himself. For nobody knew where the poor youngest Queen was.

The King ordered to search her out and to produce her at once.

All the King's men started searching for Sulata. Some started on horses; some went on foot. Every nook and corner of the city was covered. Every house was searched to see if Sulata had taken shelter there.

At last, Sulata was found in an old tottering cowshed. She used to make *Ghute* (dried cowdung cake), and sell it to some neighbours and thus eke out a miserable existence.

When the King's men produced her before the King, he could hardly recognise her—once so good-looking and so much beloved a Queen. She looked terribly thin and pale. She was in dirty, rag of a sari. There was a thick coating of sand and dirt over her once such lovely complexion. So was the condition of her hair, once so gorgeous shining, long and wavy.

The King was deeply moved to see her pitiable condition. Restraining himself with great effort, he asked Sulata to pluck the flowers.

Sulata, as it was, was shaking in fright as a result of being brought to the King's presence. She thought, the King must be wanting to chop off her head. Anyway, she tried to stretch her shaking hand to the flowers. And, lo and behold, this time the flower did neither go higher up exceeding her reach, nor did the voice from the tree sang the same tune. Instead, seven handsome youths emerged at once from seven Champa buds; and one exquisite looking girl emerged from the bud of a 'Parul' flower, which had remained so long at the topmost position and sang the same tune every time. All the seven boys and the girl called Sulata "Oh Mother, dear Mother, our good, innocent poor dear Mother! You have suffered so much for such a long time for our

sake !” They embraced her and kissed her most affectionately.

Sulata, as well as the King, felt so very much surprised at all that happened. They just could not understand the situation. Then the lovely girl Parul, told them every bit of what had happened since they were born, how very cruelly the eldest queen Premlata had buried them all at the back yard; how God had saved them from dying, so that they had survived till the Champa tree came to flower. Then if this mother touched them, they would get back their own human existence again.

When Sulata came to know that she was really the mother of such fine children, eight in all, her pleasure knew no bounds. At once she forgot all her sufferings and started caressing her children with all her love and affection.

The King became furious to see the injustice done to Sulata because of the wickedness of the eldest queen Premlata and the five Queens who were her accomplices. He ordered that a big hole should be dug at once, into the same back yard. A heap of thorny bushes were thrown into the hole. All the six Queens then were thrown in this thorny bed in the big hole. Some more thorns were put on top, covering the Queens. The hole was then packed with earth, and they perished. Thus the wicked Queens were punished for their wrong deed.

The King then took back Sulata and her eight children to the Palace, and all of them lived very happily hereafter.

• • •

THE NEEDLE KING

LONG long ago, there lived a Prince in Mymensingh in Bengal now a part of East Pakistan. A shepherd boy was his best friend. They used to roam about very happily together on the meadows and on the banks of the river Brahmaputra. The shepherd boy sometimes, used to play a flute while he took his sheep and cattle for grazing on the field. The Prince would lie down in the shade of a big tree and listen to the tune. At other times, both of them would sit in the shade of a tree and go on merrily chatting.

One day the Prince was in a particularly happy mood. He suddenly said to his friend, the shepherd boy, "Look, let us to-day vow eternal friendship. I promise you that when I would grow up and be eligible for the throne, I will make you my Premier." The shepherd boy was so happy that his eyes became full of tears in gratitude and love for his friend. He answered, "Thank you very much my dearly beloved Prince. I do appreciate your kindness and affection for me. I am hardly capable of returning your generosity—for I am a poor shepherd boy only. But this I promise you to-day as a token of my love and friendship for you, that no matter what happens in future, and whether you remember our present friendship in the distant future or not, I will always be loyal to you. I pledge my eternal loyalty and love for you, my friend."

The Prince was highly impressed and embraced his friend with true affection.

Many days passed after that, the Prince gradually lost touch with the shepherd boy. Being a Prince was not quite an easy job. He had to learn many things which took most of his time. He had to attend to his studies---then there were lessons on riding and on shooting. His days became very crowded and there was no time for idle chats with the shepherd boy or any lazy walks with him. Gradually the Prince totally forgot about the shepherd boy.

When the King, his father, died, the Prince became King. But little did he remember his promise of offering Premiership to the shepherd boy. The poor shepherd boy knew everything, but he never complained. He somehow had taken it for granted that the things would gradually take such a turn. It would not be possible for them to remain such fast friends as the Prince advanced in age. But he felt happy to think that the Prince was having a good time and he wished heartily that the Prince may enjoy his good fortune forever.

Then the Prince, who was now the King, got married to a beautiful girl called Kanchanmala. There was festivity in the Kingdom. The King's marriage was celebrated with plenty of illumination, fireworks and feasts. Now the shepherd boy became very keen to have a look at his friend's wife---the Queen. So he came to the big iron gate of the Palace, and called about, "My friend ! would you not show me your bride even once ?" The guards standing near the Palace gate, took him to be a lunatic. So they chased him out from the Palace gate. The shepherd boy felt so sorry that he no longer wished to live in the same city. So he left his home and nobody knew where he disappeared.

Next day, a very unusual thing happened. As the King woke up from his sleep, he could hardly open his eyes. Innumerable number of needles were seen stuck on his whole body---on his eyes, on the lips, nose, head, hands and feet. All his hair had turned into needles. The King could not see or talk at all. He was in great

pain—physical and mental. Suddenly did he remember his vow to his friend the shepherd boy, and realised that this must be the punishment for breaking his promise. But it was too late now. He had no power to express his thought. So he went on continuing his miserable existence.

The Queen felt very sorry to see the King in such a state. She did her very best to cure the King. She sent for the best doctors and the best *vaid*s. But no body could suggest any remedy. At last the Queen, out of her own started to pluck out a needle very carefully from the King's body. But it stuck so firm on the body that it was impossible to remove it. The Queen felt heart, broken. But since nothing could be done, she had to endure the painful sight of the King's agony. She prayed all the time for the King to become well again.

One day the Queen went to have her bath in the river. As she was going down the steps of the 'Ghat', a beautiful girl came near her and said, "Would you like to buy a maid for you? I am very keen to serve you."

The Queen rather liked this pretty girl. So she asked, "Do you think that you would be able to give some relief to the ailing King?" The girl replied, "I would try my very best". So the Queen took out a pair of golden bangles from her wrist and bought the girl with that sum.

At once the girl said, "You are looking very thin and tired. It seems as if you have not had a good bath since long. Your neck, elbows and feet do need a good scrubbing. Please take off your ornaments and let me give you a hand in scrubbing."

The Queen was quite impressed by the stranger girl's sympathy and sincerity. She said, "Thank you very much. But I can scrub myself very well. It is true that I have not had a good bath since a few days. I was much too occupied with the King's illness. Now, if you will be good enough to keep an eye on my ornaments. I would take them off and leave them here, so

that I can really have a thorough scrubbing." The girl readily agreed to guard the Queen's ornaments and fresh sari. The Queen then, left those things on the top flight of the steps of the ghat and went into the water to enjoy a good leisurely bath.

As soon as the Queen had her first dip into the water, the maid immediately changed into the Queen's dress. She put on all the ornaments also hurriedly. Then standing on that very step she called aloud to the Queen, "Oh, you lazy maid : How much longer would you take to finish your bath ? Do you expect your Queen to attend on you and wait on you. Hurry up, and come out of water."

The surprised Queen looked back and to her utter distress discovered that her newly bought maid had been transformed to her own image while she, the Queen, looked identical with the maid, as she had appeared before her. At once she understood that some evil trick was performed on her by this wicked girl. But it was too late. For the mischief was already done. She cursed her own foolishness and bad luck. Then, silently, she followed the new Queen as her maid. She could hardly see the path with bitter tears in her eyes.

As they reached the Palace, the maid, Kakanmala, who appeared as the Queen started bluffing the Minister and the other Court Officers demanding why they had not sent a palanquin to the ghat. For such vital error, their heads should be chopped off, she threatened—Everyone was thunderstruck. This kind of behaviour looked so very strange and unusual for the well-known and much-loved, kind-hearted, good-tempered Queen. They could not understand nor account for the sudden change of her whole behaviour. In terror they kept quiet.

Kakanmala, the fake Queen, sent Kanchanmala, the real Queen to the kitchen. There she was to do the kitchen-maid's job. She scrubbed the utensiles, cleaned the fish and cut them to pieces. Silently she went

about working and thought, "Oh my rotten luck ! I purchased the maid with my own bangles—and look at the irony of fate !—now the maid has been transformed to the position of the Queen, while I—the Queen have myself become a maid in her place. I do not know what sin I committed for which I am suddenly punished so very severely."

Days passed in this way. One day Kanchanmala went to the river again to wash a bag full of dirty linen of the Queen's chamber. She noticed a man there, sitting under a tree with a huge bundle of thread. The man was saying aloud to himself. "If I could get a thousand needles, then I would have eaten a melon. If I could have five thousand of them, then I would have started with a real shopping space ! And for a lakh of needles, I am willing to exchange a Kingdom".

At once the Queen approached him and said quietly, "Sir, if I show you a place full of lakhs and lakhs of needles would you be able to pluck them yourself ?" The stranger looked at her face and nodded in approval. The Queen said, "Then follow me." The man took up his huge bundle of thread and followed her slowly.

On their way, Kanchanmala told him her whole story, how suddenly the King got ill, and how her own fate changed one fine morning. The man heard everything with attention, but passed no remarks. As they entered the Palace through the back door, they met the fake Queen Kakanmala. She took the man as a hawker because he was carrying a huge bundle. She asked him to show her his merchandise. The man answered her good-humouredly, "Oh, my good Queen, I am a poor person who earns his living by doing errands for other persons. Where shall I get the money to buy any merchandise ? To-day is the day of *Poush—Sankranti* (the last day of the month of Poush—which is about the middle of December), and great festivity is going in every house. So I thought you, the Queen, must be observing this *brata* with grandeur—making plenty of pithas (sweet dishes) of various kinds. I might be of

some use to you and so I came here. If I can please you, no doubt you would remunerate me with the 'pithas'."

Now, Kakanmala, apparently, never knew anything about this *brata* (a worship) But she did not feel like expressing her ignorance. So, she put in very smartly, "yes, I know, I used to observe this *brata*, But this season I have got such a worthless maid that she could not do anything. And it is not possible for me to do everything all by myself."

The man answered, "But Ranima! (the queer) If you feel like observing the 'brata' do please go ahead, I will teach your maid to do what is required which she does not know."

Now the first thing about observing, this *brata* was to draw *alpana* finely on different things in the house. Every door step must have a design, then there must be *alpana* on the back-yard, and, of course, on the floor of the room where the deities were worshipped daily. This drawing of *alpana* was really a test of one's artistic talents, as well as one's knowledge of social conventions—because there used to be different patterns to accentuate the features of different festivals, one pattern might suit a particular festival but would be regarded as unfit for some other festival.

Kakanmala, who was totally ignorant of these rituals ordered to get a huge quantity of rice to be grinded with water for making *alpana*. When that arrived, she put in too much of water—so the paste became too thin to have an impressive colour effect. Then she got a handful of jute, dipped in that thin liquid *pituli* (grinded rice paste) and started drawing *alpana* on the backyard in a most sullenway. It looked more like putting the paste in an uneven higgledy piggledy way without bringing out any perceptible shape or sense at all. Anybody who had a glance at her work, wondered how the Queen suddenly had become totally devoid of any bit of artistic sense after all these years.

On the other corner, Kanchanmala, the supposed maid, was drawing *alpana* also. She had taken very little quantity of rice and grinded it very finely. Then she diluted it with water in proper consistency so that the colour on the ground looked very bright and effective. She used a tiny piece of an old rag and started drawing by dipping that small piece in *pituli*. Naturally, her drawing was far from being clumsy. She drew very artistically, bringing out in the patterns the designed effect befitting the occasion. There were lotuses with dainty, petals and leaves in her *alpana*. Besides the lotuses there were seven pitchers. A green coconut was drawn on top of each pitcher. Also she drew stocks full of paddy, peacocks, many types of ornaments and last of all the feet of Lakshmi—the Goddess of wealth. Her work proved how keen her aesthetic sense was, as well as her deep knowledge of these typically conventional festival drawings. Anyone who saw her work, gazed in admiration, and wondered how could an ordinary maid produce such a fine work of art.

When the Queen saw her maid's work, she felt very jealous of her and pulled a long face. Nevertheless, once she had started to observe the *brata*, there was no time to spare now. The *pithas* had to be prepared quickly. So she asked the maid to accompany her to the kitchen and to make some types of *pithas* which the maid knew how to make.

When the cooking was over, it was observed by all that the queen had prepared the most ordinary 'pithas'—called *Aske-pitha*—eaten by the commoners—and poor folk alone. The 'pithas' which were prepared by the maid were real delicacies—*chandrapuli*, *Mohan-puri*, *Oudh puli* *Kheer-murali* and *Pati-Sapta*—the usual pithas of a flourishing house which would delight a King. The dishes looked charmingly dainty. So all were surprised. How could a simple maid learn to make such rare expensive delicacies ?

Then the strange man with the bundle of thread in his hand approached Kakanmala, the fake Queen,

and asked her calmly, "Is not it better now to reveal your real position and to own up who you really are? You are none but the maid whom the Queen had bought generously with her own pair of gold bangles the other day. Please acknowledge the truth immediately in front of everyone and confess that you had played a very dirty trick on the Queen in return of her kindness and generosity. You should be thoroughly ashamed of your wickedness and ingratitude.

Kakanmala looked pale at first. But no sooner had the first reaction passed than she flew into a violent temper and started abusing that man in a vile manner. Then she ordered the hangman that the strange impertinent fellow and the new maid both should be hanged immediately. She would bathe in their blood.

The hangman, being ordered by Her Majesty herself, advanced to take the man away from the court-yard to the gallows immediately, the man uttered, "On, my good thread, do please bind the hangman quickly and make him immovable."

To the astonishment of everybody a bundle of thread reached the hangman and bound him hand and feet so tight that he hardly could move an inch.

The man then asked the thread again—"Oh my good thread, to whom do you belong?"

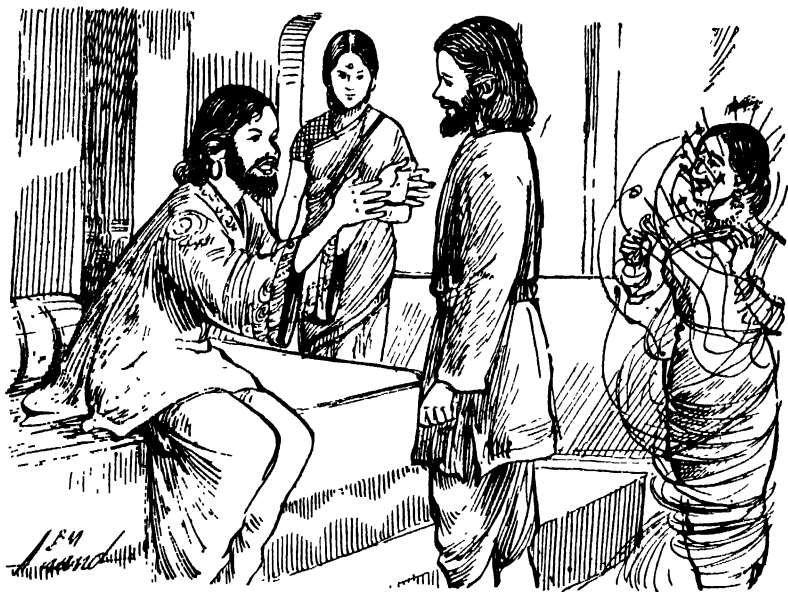
The thread answered, "He who possesses the bundle, I belong to him."

The man replied, "If you belong to me, then please start and bind the fake Queen tightly."

The thread advanced, towards Kakanmala and to everybody's horror, did bind her tightly, so that it was not possible for her to move.

The thread-man ordered again, "Oh my good thread, this time you get into all the needles, sticking on the poor King's body, undo them all and relieve the King from his long suffering, and re-stick all the needles on

the eyes and lips of this fake and witch-maid Kakanmala."



Immediately all the thread approached the King and got into each needle in a second. Then all the needles shifted at a glance from the King's body and struck on the face of Kakanmala. She started feeling restless in agony. But the needles did not spare her, nor showed any pity on her.

At last the King could open his eyes and see. His first glance fell on the thread man whom he recognised as none but his long forgotten old friend the shepherd boy. He immediately rose to embrace his friend and burst into tears. He repeatedly begged apologies of his kind friend and owned that he had been amply punished for his own foolish misconduct—to forget his childhood friend and, also, the promise. He declared that from now on there would no more be any power in heaven or earth to disunite them again. They should always and always live together till they die.

His friend only smiled at him. Suddenly he said, "But, you had presented me with a flute in the past. I have somehow lost it. It was a souvenir from you—and I would have liked to retain it with me forever. Do you think it is possible for you to give me another?"

The King answered readily, "Oh yes, of course. I would be delighted to present you with another flute. But this time it will be a golden flute—and not an ordinary one".

Kakanmala soon died in pain and penitence. Kanchanmala, the Queen, was so kind and good-hearted that she really felt sorry for her. She even shed a few drops of tears out of pity for her when Kakanmala died.

The King gave his friend the post of Premier without any delay. Whole day, the two friends worked together. But at night, they used to go out on the bank of river Brahmaputra again and sit under that same tree—their usual haunt of childhood. On moonlit nights the shepherd friend played his flute at the King's request. The King felt enchanted with the lovely tune.

Thus time started passing happily once again. The King, the Queen Kanchanmala, and the Premier, the shepherd friend, all three of them lived in the Palace and spent a happy time together hereafter.

• • •

THE STORY OF KIRANMALA

THERE was a King in Bengal who was very kind and just. He used to keep himself busy looking after the welfare of his subjects. Still he was not satisfied that he had been discharging his duties well. So, one day he called his Premier and asked, "Do you really think that everyone is happy in my kingdom?"

The poor Premier was so taken aback by this unexpected question as it was direct from the King, that he started faltering at first. Then he mustered all his courage and answered, "Oh Maharaj! would you really like me to give a truthful answer? Or would you rather that I do not tell you anything unpleasant?"

The King replied, "No, I would have the naked truth from you rather than a false or evasive answer. So, fear not, my good, faithful Premier;—you give me a correct report."

Still the Premier could not answer very frankly. He said, "In good old days the good Kings would go out for hunting at day; and at night, roam about in disguise so that they could find out for themselves the true state of their subjects."

The King was very much impressed by this idea, as well as the implied suggestion which came from the wise Premier. He said, "All right, I shall also do the same. I shall start for hunting tomorrow morning. Please make the necessary arrangements."

The very next day the King started from the capital with his huge shooting party. There were elephants, dressed gorgeously. The horses came with shining mane and polished saddles. The men who were accompanying the King in this expedition, appeared in dazzling uniforms.

But hunting was only a pretext and not the real cause of the King leaving his palace and the capital. So, he hunted at day time only. At night he used to move about in the streets, alone and in disguise, unrecognised by anybody.

In course of his rambling one night, he accidentally overheard a rather interesting conversation among three sisters who were chatting freely. Little did they imagine that they could be overheard by anybody—least of all—the King!

The sisters, were having their night's meal in the kitchen. Each of them gave an expression to their secret wishes. The eldest sister said, "I wish I could be married to the gardener of the Royal Palace."

The second sister said, "I would be very happy if I could marry the cook of the Royal kitchen."

As the youngest kept quiet, the other two sisters pressed her to express her own wish, too. Being pressed hard by both the sisters, the youngest one said at last, "I wish I could marry the King and become a Queen myself." Both the elder sisters laughed at hearing her wish and teased her, saying, "Do not you think, you are a little over-ambitious?" The youngest sister kept silent and did not talk any more.

The King, who was standing just beside the kitchen window, heard everything. He decided to fulfil their wishes, so, he returned to his Palace the next day.

The King, then sent a palanquin to fetch all these three sisters to his court. The girls were quite shocked to see the messenger from the King. They did not know what offence they might have committed for which the

Royal summons had come. They mounted the palanquin with a sinking heart. They were almost shaking with fear when they were presented before His Majesty—the King.

The King behaved very kindly with all three of them. Then he said, “I would like each of you repeat your secret wishes which you were mentioning among yourselves last night. And please be careful not to lie—for I have already overheard them.”

The girls’ faces became pale to learn that the casual conversation which they had been enjoying among the sisters about their long cherished wishes was overheard by the King. He was now well aware of their secret. Perhaps he had taken an exception to their ways of thinking, and no doubt, would punish them severely. But since the King knew the truth, it was no use denying it. So they had better confess the truth with good grace, and then ask the King to forgive them for their foolish ambition.

One by one the sisters repeated their secret wishes in front of the King with their eyes down-cast. Then they asked for his forgiveness for such ambitious remarks. Their thoughts, they said, were totally innocent, and they never meant to offend the King in the least.

The King smiled at them with good humour and said, “But why do you all imagine that I am offended? I would rather see that each of your cherished wish is fulfilled properly.”

The girls were so surprised that they did not know what to say.

Shortly after this the King saw that the eldest sister was married to his head gardener and the second sister to his head cook. The youngest sister he married himself with pomp and ceremony. He liked the girl very much and made her the Queen. She had a very quiet and sweet nature, full of kindness. The King could see at once that he had made a good choice. The Queen

would suit his household and especially his own temperament very much. He felt very happy at last.

A few years passed in this way quite happily. Then the Queen was expecting a child. The King was very happy at this. He immediately ordered construction of a new room in an exquisite way. The Queen was to have her baby Prince in that gorgeous room.

When the time approached, the Queen requested the King that as this was a difficult time for any woman, she would be grateful to the King if he would get her two sisters near her. For who could give more assistance and moral support to her at that critical time as much as her own sisters would? It would be far better than asking for hired nurses and mid-wives who would come only for the love of money and not for love of her. Her sisters, on the other hand, would be able to offer her kindness and sincere affection—just the things a woman needed at such hours. The King agreed to her request and the two sisters were brought to the Queen inside the Palace.

The two sisters were very happy at first to meet their youngest sister after a long time. They were happy to learn the news that she was expecting. But gradually as they moved about from one room to the other and, especially, saw the new room, built for the Queen, they became very jealous. They understood that amongst the three of them, this youngest sister was the luckiest girl and was enjoying the best of everything. Their individual good fortune was nothing in comparison with the youngest sister's. At once they made up their mind to harm her if chance permitted.

After a little while, it seemed that the time for the baby to arrive had come. The Queen was taken to her new room and made to lie on the new luxurious bed. The door was bolted from within. Only the two sisters were attending on the Queen.

At last the child arrived. It was a chubby looking bonny baby. It was a boy. But the sisters made no

delay in implementing their wicked plan. One of them snatched the baby quickly, and got out of the room through the back door. Hastily she took out an earthen pot, put the baby inside the pot, covered it with cotton wool and set the pot float adrift on the river.

When the Queen got back her consciousness, she wanted to see the child. The sisters showed her a small pup and said it was nothing but this little thing. The Queen felt very sorry and ashamed. But she did not complain, only wept silently.

When the King heard the news he also became very disappointed. But since nothing could be done, he, too, kept silent. Both the sisters felt very happy that now, at last, they could make the lucky youngest sister quite miserable.

Next year the Queen started expecting again. The King was very hopeful that everything would go on well this time and he would have a son. So was the thought in the mind of the Queen. In due time the sisters were called again. But they performed the same mean trick with this second boy also, and set it floating on the river in the same way. This time they showed a small kitten to the King and the Queen. Both of them were heart-broken. Only the wicked sisters gloated over their misery.

The year after, came a beautiful baby girl. But her fate was no better than that of those two boys born previously. The King and Queen were shown a wooden doll.

After the third time, the King became disgusted. He also got a bit suspicious about the Queen herself—whether she was fully normal and human. Perhaps she was a witch or some unnatural being. Otherwise how could she produce such awful things? Was it possible for a human being to give birth to a pup, a kitten, and a wooden toy? So, it was better to drive her out of the Palace before she could get chances of casting more evil spells.

So the poor Queen was ordered to get out of the kingdom. She obeyed the order silently as she had been bearing her suffering and disappointment for three years.

A Brahmin was having his morning bath and 'puja' on the river side. He had almost finished when he noticed an earthen pot floating on the water. It came so near him that he had to push it aside. While doing so, he saw there was a tiny little baby wide awake inside it. He was so surprised to see a baby float in this way. He took the baby out of the pot and brought it home. The Brahmin had no child. So his wife was very happy to see the baby and gladly agreed to foster it.

Next year, also, the same thing happened. Another *sara* (earthen pot) reached the same ghat while the Brahmin was bathing there. He uncovered the pot and saw the baby in it. He brought it home and handed the baby over to his wife. The childless woman was quite happy to get another boy. They named the boys Arun and Barun.

In the following year, the same phenomenon recurred. But this time it was a baby girl. The Brahmin brought her also to his wife. His wife felt very happy that it was a girl this time. They named her immediately Kiranmala.

As the boys grew up, the Brahmin taught them the *Shastras*. Kiranmala learnt household work from the Brahmin's wife. Looking after the cow, which was supposed to be a sacred animal, was one of the essential duties of every woman. The Brahmin had a lovely cow, with wide innocent eyes called, 'Kajal-lata'. Kiranmala learnt to look after her. It gave Kiranmala great pleasure in feeding the cow and scrubbing her glossy white body.

When the children reached their youth, the Brahmin and his wife called them one day. The Brahmin, then said, "Look my dears, all of you have become grown-up now. I thank my stars that we could bring

you up in the way we really wanted to. We feel very proud of you and also very happy to find that you are perfectly accomplished and can face a life of your own. You no longer require any help from us. I am glad that we could finish discharging our worldly duties. Now it is time that we must concentrate on the other world and on God. So, from now on, you three look after yourselves, and be the heirs of whatever little property and money I have. We are leaving this world and starting for another—the heaven.”

Arun, Barun and Kiranmala felt very upset to hear this. They were very much devoted to their foster parents. The thought of parting from them made the brothers and sister deeply sorry. But as that was supposed to be the desired goal for any holy or dutiful person, they could not wish to prevent the couple from accomplishing their goal. They wept silently. The Brahmin couple, then, left this world and went to *Golok*—that is, the heaven of god Vishnu.

The King felt very lonely and depressed in the Palace. An atmosphere of gloom somehow reigned there forever. So, he decided to go out hunting for a change.

One day, the King was very thirsty after a hunting excursion. He went in search of water, and eventually reached the house where Arun, Barun and Kiranmala lived. He met Kiranmala at the door and asked for some water. After she gave him nice cool water, freshly drawn from the well in the court-yard, the King looked at her. He liked her very much, for she was beautiful and her behaviour was full of kindness. He questioned her about her parents and other relations. Kiranmala answered that she was the daughter of a Brahmin who had died sometime ago. She mentioned about her two brothers also.

The King was very surprised to find so much beauty in an ordinary Brahmin's house. The sight of Kiranmala kindled in his heart, his love for 'children' such as this sweet girl. He wished he had a daughter like her—so that he would not feel so lonely in the Palace.

Before, taking leave from Kiranmala, he said, "You have quenched my thirst so kindly, my good girl. If you ever need any assistance in any way, please do not hesitate to approach me. I am the lonely King of this city. I would very much like to help you in return of your kindness.

Kiranmala agreed to do so. The King left the place then.

When Arun and Barun came she told them about the King. Then she requested the brothers to build a nice new house. They would invite the King one day for a meal when the house would be complete. The brothers were very fond of their only sister and agreed to do so to please her.

So the construction work started. They could not afford to hire any labour. The brothers started laying the bricks themselves. Kiranmala helped them by fetching pitcher after pitcher of water which was necessary to continue the work.

At last the house was finished. Both the brothers took great pains to build it as gorgeously as possible. It was quite high and looked almost palatial. The inside walls they painted with great care and skill. Kiranmala guided them most in this work of painting—she herself, too, did the painting in parts. Then there was a garden surrounding the house and a small orchard. The trees and shrubs were planted as soon as the building work began. So by the time the house was complete, the garden was ready, too. Happily they looked at their own achievement and felt very satisfied. Now they were in a position to invite the King once for a meal in their house. They were discussing about the most suitable date when, suddenly, a *Sanyasi* (mendicant) appeared there.

He said, "You have done a fine piece of work, I find, it is certainly a creditable endeavour. The house looks really luxurious and shows your skill at every place.

Why do not you exert a little more and make it unique?"

Arun and Barun answered eagerly, "But we have done all we could. We simply did not know how to make it any better, and that is why we stopped and completed the work."

The Sanyasi said, "I will give you a tip. Start walking towards the north-east direction, then turn east-north. You will arrive on a hill called Maya-hill. You will find there all the trees made of gold and their flowers of diamonds. In one of such trees you will see a golden parrot sitting and singing a lovely tune at times. If you could reach that distant 'Maya-hill', collect some of those gems and fetch that parrot, your house will then be really unique." The Sanyasi, then, quickly went away.

Arun was very much impressed by this piece of information. He said, "Barun, and Kiranmala, I would like to start for this Maya-hill at once. Think of the beauty and grandeur it would add to our new house if only I could bring some of those gems, described by the sage, here. I am leaving my sword with you. If you see that it has started rusting then you presume that I am dead." With these words he left the place hastily.

Sometime passed ; the brother and sister inspected the sword everyday. One morning Kiranmala said there was rust on Arun's sword. They got very worried. Barun said, "Now Kiranmala, do not feel so depressed. There may be only something wrong with our elder brother. He may be in some trouble, but not quite dead. I am proceeding at once in search of him. In the meantime, do please look after yourself and do not fret too much. I am leaving my bow and arrow with you. If the string gives way ever, you should know that your brother Barun is no more in this world." In a second he was out of sight, and Kiranmala was standing speechless in grief and anxiety.

When Barun reached near Maya Hill, some fairies started dancing and singing, one of them shouted. "Oh, you prince ! where are you going so eagerly ? Wait, you stop for a moment and look behind ?"

Barun stopped and did look behind. As he did so, he was transformed into a marble statue then and there. He understood now that his elder brother, Arun, must have met with the same fate. He felt utter despair as there appeared no hope of change of their fate.

Next morning, while inspecting the bow, Kiranmala discovered that its string had given way. She gazed at it for a while, but did not weep or start lamenting. She immediately decided her course of action. So she got up and fed the cow. Then she changed into the dress of Barun, and took the sword, left by Arun. Thus, fully attired in a boy's dress, Kiranmala started towards the direction of the Maya-Hill in search of her brothers. Her brave heart somehow felt sure that she would be able to meet them somewhere.

Kiranmala walked and walked without stopping for a breath even. Thirteen days and nights she went on walking. Still there was no trace of anything which looked like answering the description of the Maya-Hill. On the fourteenth day she reached a hill and she wondered if it was the Maya-Hill.

Suddenly some animals, fairies and ghosts approached her all together. They wanted to surround her and to stop her from advancing any further. Some said, "Oh, Prince ! I will eat you up piece by piece".

Some bears and lions said, "We will swallow you down in whole".

The fairies commented while singing and dancing, "Oh Prince, listen to us and please do not advance any further."

The ghosts emerged in horrible figures and tried to block her way in front. They said, "Why are you going

to that side ? Do not you know that nothing but sure death is waiting for you there ?”

Each one of the ghosts, the fairies and the animals tried its utmost to prevent Kiranmala. They even tempted her by saying, “Come and join us ! We will get you lovely jewels and a charming Princess to marry !”

Even nature tried to join with them against poor Kiranmala. Suddenly there was rain, pouring down heavily. Lightening flashed from one end of the sky to the other. The piercing noise of thunder made her almost deaf and the heavy rain blinded her. But nothing could shake that brave heart of Kiranmala. She looked at none of the figures, listened to no advice, took notice of no temptation or frights. Steadily she advanced towards a golden tree with the open sword in her hand.

Just as she reached under that tree, a blue bird said at once from the tree top—“So you have come at last. Good ! Now please do quickly as I say. Pluck a flower from this tree and hold me on your hand. Then get some water from the nearest fall. After that beat this drum loudly. It is lying over there.”

Kiranmala, with a trembling heart, did every thing whatever she was told to do by the blue bird. As she beat the drum on the third stoke of her stick, everything on the scene changed. There was no more of rain, thunder or lightening. It became sparkling moonlight. To her greater amazement, she could no longer see any trace of that huge gathering of fairies, ghosts and animals. All of them somehow had vanished instantaneously. Only the peacocks were dancing here and there. Also, some nightingales (Kokil and Doll) were singing lovely tunes.

Then the bird said again, “Now you sprinkle the fresh water on the stones.” Kiranmala obeyed the bird once more. Suddenly all those hundreds and hundreds of pieces of stones became human figures, as if by magic, at the very touch of the water. All of them were youths, wearing princely apparels. To her great joy Kiranmala

observed her two elder brothers, Arun and Barun, also present in that crowd of Princes.

They all approached her and said, "Oh you, the great valiant heart ! We do not know how to thank you. Our words fail us. We do not even know who you are, from where you came and why you did come at all. But we feel eternally grateful to you for bringing us back to life. May God bless you and make you happy."

Kiranmala looked very shy and awkward and did not know what to say in answer. Arun and Barun came to her and said with a smile, "But for you dear sister, we would never have been rescued. How could you command so much of courage and resourcefulness, we wonder. We are very lucky to have a brave and loving sister like you. Let us get back to our own place now in peace."

Kiranmala was much too happy to get back her brothers. She collected some golden plants, some flowers of diamonds and pearls and they started the journey homewards. She also carried the blue bird in her hand very affectionately.

As they reached their own home, Kiranmala immediately planted the golden saplings in the garden. She also put the bird on a silver stand, made by Arun quickly.

Next morning when she came to water the new plants, to her great joy and amazement, she saw all the plants had grown into tall trees overnight. They had silver leaves and flowers of pearls and diamonds. She went back inside to call her brothers to come and see the beautiful trees.

Arun and Barun jumped out. They also were very surprised but equally happy, too. Then Arun said, "Now sister, I think you have got all that you wanted. Do not you think it is time for us to invite the King to the new house now ?"

Before Kiranmala could answer, the bird from the stand said, "Yes, it is high time that you do invite the King; so please do not delay any further."

It is said that news travels faster than the wind. So the story of this beautiful house with its unique garden reached the King quicker than the invitation. He was quite taken aback by the news. Those young children of the Brahmin have built such a palatial building within such a short time! "Is it really possible? Why, I was there only the other day." The King said in amazement.

He became curious to have a look at their work and decided to pay them a visit immediately.

So the King alone arrived at the same old place, and knocked at the door. He was bewildered by the magnificence of the building and the garden. His own Palace seemed nothing in comparison—for he certainly had not got those gorgeous golden trees full of gems.

Kiranmala answered his knock, and opened the door. She was very pleasantly surprised to find the caller none other than the King himself. She received him courteously and brought him in. Then she introduced the King to her brothers and asked them to take the King round the house and especially the garden. She herself went to get the meal ready for the King.

The bird called her again and said, "Kiranmala, do as I bid you. Prepare the meal as I ask you to do, and put me on my stand in the room where the King dines."

The King became rather tired after going round the house and the garden. He admired everything very much and appreciated their skill and energy to have completed such a flawless construction.

The King's dinner was served with perfect conventional ceremony. A small square carpet called *asan* was spread on the shining floor of the main bed-room for the King to sit. The *asan* had lovely designs woven

on it with silken and golden threads. A huge big silver *Thali* (a big plate) contained pillau and a few other items of vegetables. Surrounding the *thali* were a number of small *bati* (bowls) full of fish, meat and various kinds of sweets like *payes* (rice-pudding); beside the *thali* there was a silver glass full of water, scented with rose water. As the King sat on his *asan*, Kiranmala sat on the ground facing him with a small fan in her hand. She started swinging the fan gently to drive away if any fly came in. But there was no fly; and this was more an expression of courtesy and affectionate care.

The King was going to compliment her on her culinary art when, suddenly, to his great surprise, he observed that each food item was made of gold coins. He looked at Kiranmala and said, "But surley you do not expect me to eat this ! This is not food at all, each dish is nothing but a show piece made of gold coins. Can any human being eat this kind of food ? Are you all joking with me ?"

Immediately a voice from behind answered, "But why can not you eat these dishes, Maharaj ? If it can be possible for a human being to beget kittens and pups and wooden dolls, surely food made of gold coins can also be eaten by another human being."

The King got startled and looked back to see who was speaking. He saw a golden bird only, sitting on its stand. The bird repeated its words again as the King looked at it. It completed by saying at last, "Maharaj, how was it that a wise person like you could be deceived so easily ? How could you believe the concocted story about your babies as true ?"

The King sat still like a statue for a long time. The past flashed back in his memory very sharply and vividly. He understood what a foolish thing he had done by believing the false story which sprang from nothing but sheer jealousy. Slowly and gradually his eyes became full of tears, and tears started falling drop after drop on the silver *thali*. The injustice he had done to his Queen and perhaps, to the three perfectly normal

human babies, was un-forgivable even by God. He thought, Oh ! how he wished he could undo his part !

In a miserable voice he asked the bird, "Oh, you wise bird ! You have made me fully realise the depth of my foolishness and what a great sin I have committed by inflicting injustice on the innocents. But since you know everything so well, I beg you to answer only one question of mine. Is it there any way left to undo my sin ? I bitterly regret my past act. I will at once start a search for my Queen whom I banished so very unjustly. But, what about those babies ? Is any of them alive yet ? If so, how could I find them ?"

The bird replied, "Maharaj, you may rest assured that all those three babies came to no harm through their good fortune and the mercy of God. And if you are serious about getting them back, you do not have to take much trouble—for here they are all the three with you at present. These two young boys and this sweet girl Kiranmala are none but your deserted babies whom the late Brahmin adopted and brought up like his own children."

The King just could not believe his ears. He at once looked at Kiranmala with his eyes full of tears. Then his sight fell on Arun and Barun, also, and he simply could not control himself and broke down into violent sobs. The boys just did not know what to do; so they stood beside him helplessly. Only Kiranmala was brave enough to try to console him. She said in a low voice, full of sympathy, "Oh Maharaj, please be calm and do not accuse yourself so much. After all a noble soul like yours could not have imagined the world to be so wicked. And we three brothers and sister have come to no harm, after all, and I am sure it would be possible for you to trace the Queen, our mother."

The King drew his dear daughter on to his chest and blessed her heartily. He also embraced his two sons. But his conscience was not at rest till he started a search for his Queen. So he told them that he would very much

like to proceed for his capital along with them, and try to get back their mother, the Queen. His children agreed readily and so they all started towards the capital. In this journey, too, Kiranmala did carry the bird in her hand very carefully and gratefully.

As they reached the Palace, the King immediately called his *Mantry*—the Prime Minister, and told him the whole story. Then he ordered an immediate search for the Queen.

The King's men went out at once in different directions to find the banished Queen. But they hardly could trace her after the lapse of so many years. So, one after another they came back and told the King that the task was next to impossible. There was no trace of the Queen anywhere.

While this was happening in the court, the bird inside the Palace called Kiranmala. Lowering its voice it said, "I know the place where your poor mother is at present, I suggest three of you—brothers and sister—go to her at once and bring her back."

The brothers and the sister were too happy to do so. They wanted to start immediately. So they requested the bird for a clear direction of their destination.

The bird told them that they were to cross the river and reach the other bank, if they would proceed southwards, they would come to a small jungle. Inside the jungle, they would find a small hut. Their mother lived in it and, so, they would find her there.

They followed the bird's direction. When they came to the hut, they found a shrivelled, shrunken, old woman with lot of grey hair, was sitting near the door and was spinning from *Maki* (a small hand-weaving instrument). She could hardly be recognised as an ex-queen of beauty.

But the children had been directed by the bird. So they spotted their mother at once. One by one they touched

her feet with great reverence and introduced themselves to her. They also told her why they had come.



The poor woman's joy knew no bounds. She hardly could believe her eyes or ears. Was it really possible that these three young boys and girl were really hers? Or were the angels only playing a trick on her? She wept and laughed alternately till Kiranmala embraced her and urged her to hurry to get back to the King.

The King was sitting silently in his room. He had given up almost all hope of finding back the Queen. So he was feeling very sad and the burden of his past guilt was weighing on his mind very heavily. Suddenly he noticed Arun, Barun, and Kiranmala were coming to him. Along with them there was another person also, a frail woman with grey hair. He sprang up from his seat and rushed towards them. Though time and sorrow had left their marks on her, still it was not difficult for the King to recognise his once beloved queen. Tears of joy and happiness started coming down from the eyes of both of them. The same was the condition of their three children.

So hereafter, everything went on well. The King and the Queen started living a very happy and full life with their three children whom they adored.

Only the King was so enraged at the thought of the Queen's jealous sisters that he ordered to bury them alive. But the Queen and Kiranmala begged him not to be so harsh. They told him what suffering they had to go through; that past could not be undone. Also their present and future happiness had been restored through the mercy of God. So why should the King bother about two petty-minded women any more? They were not worth the King's thought. It would be better to forget them, and the unpleasant past. This is what the blue bird, which used to turn golden, also counselled.

• • •

THE STORY OF PRINCE RUPKUMAR

PRINCE RUPKUMAR was the only child of the King and Queen of Satgram, in Bengal. Satgram was a small kingdom in the north, at the foot of the hills not far away from the Himalayas. It was well-watered by numerous streams which came down the low hills and eventually fell into the river Moyna. The plains were fertile. Just after the rains, in autumn, it was a wonderful sight to see, along the river banks, tall, dark-green grass called 'Kas', waving their silky, white tufts. Altogether, the kingdom was a picture of peace and prosperity.

Prince Rupkumar was very sporting, lively and kind-hearted. No one could ride faster than the Prince nor shoot down a flying bird with an arrow. He was so handsome and sympathetic that the poor knew no better friend. So he was loved by his people. As for the parents, he was the apple of their eyes.

One spring morning the Prince suddenly decided after a dream, which he did not disclose to anyone, that he must go out and travel in other countries. When they heard this, the King and Queen and all their friends tried their best to make the Prince change his mind. He was too young. He had not moved out of Satgram before. Soon it would be very hot. But the Prince would not listen. The King had to give in. After all, the King had taken out many expeditions across the sea and returned with his ships laden with trophies of war, jewels and fine silks and precious stones. In search of

adventure, he had crossed the plains and rivers of Bengal, penetrated dark forests and seen the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. The Queen, who had to agree to the King going out on expeditions, could not refuse her son's demand. She thought out in her own mind which friends of the Prince will go with him and which wrestlers, disguised as servants, so that if it became necessary, they also could take a hand in saving the Prince from enemies. But the Prince would not listen. He must go alone, he said. He would take only his fastest horse and the sword given by his grandfather, the late King, and a talisman, a big ruby from his mother.

In a few days it was the New Year. Satgram wore a new look. You could not see more beautiful white flowers—rows and rows of them, anywhere in the world. Being spring, these flowers, were very heavily-scented and the birds must have flown to this place from many lands. You can almost hear, even now, the sound of the flutes and drums and of people walking in crowds on the roads. But next morning, Rupkumar was to leave. The King and the Queen, his teachers and friends, the soldiers whom he loved and the whole town came to bid him goodbye. You could see sorrow on their face. The Prince had given strict instructions that no one should follow him beyond the stream just outside the city gates. The King could control himself but you could see fear in the Queen's eyes as Rupkumar bade her farewell. So they all returned home.

Rupkumar travelled miles and miles through villages, streets and farms. His horse never tired and was his greatest friend. He crossed many rivers some of them were very wide like Ganga, Padma and Brahmaputra and looked like the sea. They reminded him of Satgram which, sometimes made him homesick and think of his parents and friends. He had heard the names of these mighty rivers, but had never thought that he would see them. Many a time he sat on the river bank admiring the gentle flow of water, dipping his hand into the stream or bathe in the cool, clear water. His horse

would stop beside a brook and both of them rest under the shade of a tree. So it went on for days and days.

One day, before the rains were to break, Rupkumar, entered a dense forest. The trees stood like giants, many, many years old. The branches touched one another and under the trees it looked almost dark, at noon. Rupkumar's horse, which never shied, hesitated to follow the track. When the young master drove him hard, for a minute the horse turned back its head, sniffed—was it for the air of Satgram?—and started galloping very hard along the track as Rupkumar directed. Did the animal smell some mystery Rupkumar could not see?

Strangely, there was not a sound, not a movement of the leaves in the forest. There was no gurgling of brooks; no birds; not even an animal ran across their way. Rupkumar, remembered his mother and drew out the sword. At last, after what looked like many hours, the forest became thin and just on the edge of the forest, stood a magnificent palace built of red sandstone. The front gate was very high and wide enough to allow two elephants to pass. It was beautifully decorated but no one stood beside the huge drum fixed near the top of the gate. The palace had many towers. The tallest nearly touched the sky. You could still see the flag fluttering in the wind. Rupkumar had to admit to himself that his father's palace was like a dwarf compared with this fort.

Taking courage in both hands, Rupkumar walked through the gate. Strangely, no guards stood at the gate. The sentries were not at their posts. Greatly puzzled, Rupkumar walked tardily into the palace. There was no trace of any living soul anywhere. There was no stir of life of any kind. Surprisingly everything was exquisitely beautiful. In hushed silence, the Prince walked along, tying his horse to the back of a carved chair made of black marble.

In the court-yard he saw an amazing sight. The place was full of sentries, servants, courtiers and others.

On the left hand side were the stables in which he saw a number of horses and richly—caparisoned elephants. But these had all turned into stone. You could see even the pet monkey frozen in its movement. The Prince stood still as if fixed to the ground himself and stared at them as if in a trance. Very soon he recovered from the shock of surprise and entered another room. This was the armoury. He could see hundreds of swords, lances, shields, daggers, bows and arrows and huge catapults. The few guards inside the armoury had turned into stone.

Opening the very heavy door Rupkumar tiptoed into the next room which was the court chamber. The first things he noticed were giant sized golden lamps still burning and the light was reflected first on the ceiling decorated with glittering gems reflected on a throne made of a single piece of crystal. On it sat a very robust built middle-aged man, wearing a long beard. The diamond set on his crown was more brilliant than anything the Prince had seen. Standing below the throne were the Ministers and the Generals followed by Musicians and Courtiers. Beautiful maidens stood with peacock fans in hand near the King. But were all statues. It looked as if someone had carved out the whole palace out of stone.

But the Prince must move on. Reluctantly, he dragged himself along. He felt depressed, almost weary in spirit for this was an amazing sight. At a given moment, the entire court within the palace had been struck dead.

Rupkumar's eyes fell on a beautiful lake a little distance away at the centre of which stood a beautiful house covered with jasmine. There were so many lotuses clustering around the plinth that you could hardly see the water. The Prince walked up the stairs and very gently opened the ivory door. As he looked into the room, his eyes were almost dazzled—a beautiful girl lay fast asleep. No fairy could be as beautiful as her. The fragrance of white lillies placed in the

room, added a coolness and gentleness which the Prince had never experienced before. Rupkumar stood at the door eagerly waiting for the smallest sign of life. No man had ever seen more beauty. But no faté seemed to have been more cruel.

At last, tired of waiting, Rupkumar entered the room and looked around very carefully. The windows had been closed. There was still some water in the jug near the bed. His eye fell on two little sticks—one made of gold, the other of silver—lying near the head of the sleeping Princess. Rupkumar picked up these two unlikely objects which had been kept near the Princess. While his heart was heavy with all that he saw, his fingers were playing with the little sticks. Accidentally, the golden stick suddenly slipped from his hand and touched the hand of the sleeping beauty. Lo and behold the sleeping Princess very gently opened her lotus-like eyes and gazed all around as in a dream. She looked as astonished as the startled Prince. Then she sat up and asked the Prince who he was and how he had come there. Rupkumar told his story and said how very happy he was to have met her. He thanked his stars that at least the Princess was not like the others who had turned into stones, but had obviously remained in deep sleep.

Rupmati looked very pathetic and told the Prince that she too had been lifeless since ages like everything else in the palace. It was the generous act of the Prince, in touching her with the golden stick, that had ended her slumber and brought her back to life. The Prince was, not only pained and surprised, but also very much intrigued, and requested the Princess to tell him all about the mysterious castle and its story.

The Princess answered slowly in a melancholy voice, "Long, long ago there was a horrible-looking magician who fell in love with the Princess as soon as he saw her in her garden one morning and wanted to marry her. The Princess refused his proposal. Then the magician approached the King and begged his daughter's hand

in marriage. The magician was very ugly and wicked. So the King ordered his guards to put the magician behind the bars. As the guards came near, the magician uttered some verses casting a spell. All the men, women and children, the animals, everything in the palace fell asleep. They turned into stone then and there. If some one could make the magic golden stick touch the Princess, only then would she return to life. Similarly if anyone sprinkled water, touched by the magic silver stick, the others too would come back to life again." Many years had passed but no one had chanced to come to this dead city. Now the Prince had come, discovered the magic stick and brought the Princess back to life. So the Princess' heart was full of gratitude. She asked the Prince to sprinkle water, touched by the silver stick, on her parents and bring them and everyone else back to life.



Then Rupkumar and the Princess, jointly, stirred the water with the silver stick and together they sprinkled water on all the stone statues. It was an astonishing sight to see them wake up one by one breathe and

then open their eyes and move very gently—unsure of their steps at first. The King and Queen embraced their daughter and shed tears of happiness. They saw, standing in front of them, the young Prince, whom they had never met before. Satisfying her parents' eager curiosity, the Princess told them how the miracle of their coming to life again had happened—how Rupkumar had brought Rupmati back to life. But for him who knows how long they might have slept.

The King thanked the Prince most heartily and the Queen expressed her deepest gratitude. Prince Rupkumar became quite embarrassed and promptly found a way out by suddenly remembering his horse. Through all this excitement, Rupkumar had forgotten his most faithful companion. As he entered the palace courtyard, on his spirited horse, the King greeted him again and proposed that the Prince should marry his daughter. Nothing could make the Prince happier. He had fallen in love with her at first sight. The Princess, who was shy, blushed. She looked like a beautiful pearl, radiant in the first light of the morning sun.

Without waiting for the Royal Priest to settle the date and hour of the wedding, the Lord Chamberlain immediately started making arrangements for the wedding. Hundreds of workers started decorating the Palace. As the wedding day approached, the streets were cleaned up, festoons hung on poles, parties of musicians started playing the *shehnai* sitting on a platform erected on the gates high above the grounds. In the Royal stables there was intense activity dressing the elephants and horses, polishing the swords and equipments on display. Inside the palace everyone was laughing and gesticulating and working to the maximum of their physical capacity. Milk and curds were kept in large utensils which looked like little lakes. Sweets were piled up in mountains. Gay little children in bright colourful clothes played in the streets the whole day and in the evening the lights went on. What was a dreamland, looked like heaven.

The beautiful pandal in which the wedding was to take place, was decorated with lotuses and many kinds of flowers. The air was heavy with fragrance. Just outside the entrance were placed young banana trees with their green branches outspread. At their feet were placed big earthen pitchers, full of water, as a mark of fulfilment. In red and gold and white were painted beautiful designs according to the tradition, decorating the pitchers (*mangal ghat*). Long strings were tied from one tree to another. On these were hung up mango leaves. They invoked good luck and blessings. Not to be outdone, the ground on which the couple would walk was painted beautifully in white. Many ladies were busy, grinding rice in water into fine paste. The talented ones among them, painted 'alpana' of many designs, flowers, conch-shells, fish and peacocks. Equally attractive were the designs made on the ground with different coloured pulses and corn.

Then came the wedding night. The King himself would give away his beautiful daughter to Rupkumar. The Princess wore brocade and a heavy Banarsi sari of scarlet and gold, jewellery and flowers. The Prince came on horse back dressed in yellow satin and pink turban. As soon as he approached the final gate, at which tall banana trees had been planted deep and beautifully decorated with festoons of bright flowers and green leaves, the Prince, who was looking superbly handsome, jumped down from his horse. Young maidens of the household, dressed in all the colours of the rainbow, blew conchshells in welcome. Others gave the warmest welcome in *uludhwani* that is, traditional auspicious notes to usher in a guest. The Prince was led to the place where the marriage was to be performed. The excitement knew no bounds as the bride was brought, seated on a flat wooden board called a *Pinri*. Her best friend lifted the veil and *shubhadristi* and the bride and the bridegroom looked lovingly, for the first time, at each other on that day. They exchanged garlands after which the Princess

stepped down. The bride and the bridegroom then moved into the small platform made of earth, a few inches above the ground, where the ritual of the wedding was performed.

The priest chanted mantras and in front of sacrificial fire, the marriage was performed.

The prince and Princess, then, bade goodbye to the King and the Queen. The bride's father gave numerous presents to the daughter and son-in-law. These saris and dresses, ornaments, jewels and precious stones and many other valuable presents were loaded on horses, elephants and camels. The Princess sat in a golden palanquin carried by eight hefty bearers, who hummed tunes as they ran along. The Prince rode beside the 'Palki' on milk-white horse, his one friend and companion through the years of adventure.

Thus Rupkumar's adventure came to a very happy ending and with the beautiful Princess on his side and loaded with presents, they left for Satgram.

• • •

THE STORY OF SUKHU AND DUKHU

IN the village of Pataspur there lived a weaver. He had two wives. Each had a daughter. But the first wife and her daughter Sukhu were the weaver's favourites. So, both the mother and the daughter had an easy time. They kept away from the household chores. Poor second wife and her daughter had to run the house. Between the mother and the daughter, they bore all the daily drudgery of running the house. They weaved, cleaned and scrubbed, washed and cooked. After serving the others, they barely had enough food for themselves. But both of them were very good-natured and patient. They took it as their duty to please others and look after them. They never bothered about their own comfort or leisure but felt happy in making others comfortable. From morning till night the mother and the girl Dukhu slaved for the household. They did not even grudge Sukhu and her mother having such an easy time, plenty of food and good clothes.

The weaver passed away one night suddenly. The first wife, just after the bereavement period was over, got separated from her co-wife and Dukhu. But she did one clever thing. She hid all valuables and cash before the partition. So whatever was left to be divided between the two widows, was very meagre.

Thus Sukhu's mother deceived her co-wife and inherited almost all the possessions of her husband, the late weaver. So she could afford a better standard of living for herself and her daughter Sukhu. She would buy the

head of a big rahu fish, cook and serve it to her daughter Sukhu. Some other day she bought lovely vegetables. She derived great pleasure in showing off before Dukhu and her mother.

Poor Dukhu and her mother weave whole day. Still they can not make more than a towel—'Gamocha' a day. They sell it at the daily market or weekly 'haat'. Whatever little money they get out of the sale of their wares, they buy only the bare necessities of life like rice, oil and one or two such other things. They can not even dream of having luxuries like good vegetables or fish—least of all, expensive, delicacies such as the head of Rahu fish.

One day, Dukhu's mother noticed that her cotton seemed a little moist. So she put it out in the sun and then went to the pond for her bath. She put Dukhu in charge of the cotton.

Suddenly a gust of wind came and it blew away all the cotton. Poor Dukhu tried her very best to save the cotton, but it was in vain. She could hardly save anything from the strong breeze. At last she wept in misery

Then the wind said, "Dukhu, my girl ! do not cry any more, you follow me and I will give you cotton." So on this assurance Dukhu did follow the wind.

On her way, a cow said, "Dukhu, where are you going ? Will you be good enough to clean up my shed a little ?"

Dukhu dried her eyes and cleaned up the cow-shed. She also gave some dried straws and water and fed the cow. Then she followed the wind again.

As Dukhu advanced a little more, a banana tree in the wayside said, "Dukhu, where are you going ? I am half-covered by weeds and parasites. Will you be kind enough to clear this mess a little ?"

Dukhu stopped and cleared the weeds, and tore down the parasites.

Again, after some distance, as she went, a huge big *Seora* tree called Dukhu and said, "Will you please clean the dry leaves surrounding my trunk?" Like a good soul as she was, Dukhu swept out all those piles and piles of dry leaves and made the place look clean.

As Dukhu went a little further, a horse said, "Dukhu, could you please get me some grass?" Dukhu stopped and cut some grass and fed the horse.

At last she reached a sparkling white house. An old woman was sitting on the veranda of the house. She was spinning thread, and that thread was automatically transformed into saris.

Now, guess who could this old woman be? Who else but the mother of the Moon herself—the only lady who went on spinning endlessly!

The wind said, "Dukhu, go to the old woman and ask her for your cotton. You would get it from her."

So Dukhu went near her made a bow and touched her feet humbly as the custom was when you presented yourself to any superior person. Then she said, "*Ahye-ma!* (Granny) The wind has blown away all our cotton. My mother had put me in charge of looking after the cotton which she had spread out in the sun. Now I shall be taken to task for losing all the cotton. Will you be good enough to return my lost cotton?"

The old woman's face was half-covered with her profuse milk-white hair. She raised her face, removing the locks of hair which fell on her eyes. She saw a sweet little girl who was standing near her. At once she was touched.

So she said, "Oh! my little darling girl! May you live long: There are *gamochas* (towels) in that room. You will find some saris also in the other room. In the third room you will get some oil. You take anything you require and then go to the pond at the back yard and have a nice dip first. After that you have

some food and only then I shall give you some cotton, I promise."

Dukhu entered the room in search of saris and other things. She was amazed to see there a huge collection of lovely saris. But she did not take any from the best lot. She chose a sari which looked very ordinary and not too expensive. After putting a little oil on her hair, she started for the pond.

As soon as Dukhu finished her first dip in the water, she became an exceedingly beautiful girl. Not even the fairies in heaven perhaps looked so very beautiful. But Dukhu was totally unaware of this change in her, as she could not see herself in a mirror.

Then at the end of the second dip, Dukhu's arms, her neck, her ear, her head and her feet too, became fully decked with lovely golden ornaments. This she could see with her eyes; and she became very surprised to see them. She wondered how could she get such ornaments suddenly. Was it the mercy of any god? or a trick of any undesirable spirit? She did not take another plunge in the water, but returned to the house hastily.

When she entered the dining room, she saw so much of appetizing delicacies present there, that for a moment she felt tempted to taste them. But on second thought she decided not to behave in a cheap or greedy way. So she took some ordinary food like *panta* (rice soaked in water) and hurried back to the old woman.

The old woman looked at her. She saw the transformation of Dukhu, but did not mention anything to her. She only said, "My good girl! so you are bathed and fed, I see. Now you go to the fourth room. There is a box containing cotton in that room. You take as much as you want.

Dukhu came into the room and found a number of boxes of all sizes full of cotton. She took the smallest box almost the size of a toy-box and went back to the old woman.

The old woman said, "So you have got your cotton. I hope you are happy now and no longer afraid of being scolded by your mother. Now you take this tiny box of cotton with you and go back to your mother. And may God bless you "

Dukhu again touched the old woman's feet, thanked her gratefully and started on her return journey.

Dukhu first met the same horse on her way back. The horse called her and said, "Dukhu, my good girl ! I have got a small present for you. Please come near me and take your present."

Dukhu went to the horse and took her present. It was a lovely flying colt. Dukhu was so happy to get it and she thanked the horse heartily.

When Dukhu was passing by the big *Seora* tree, it said, "Dukhu, I have got a small present for you. Will you please take it ?" The tree gave her a pitcher full of gold coins.

The banana tree presented her a huge bunch of golden bananas. The cow also presented her a delightful thing—it was a lovely white she-calf, called *Kapila*. It could give milk at any hour, as much as you wanted. Dukhu was almost over-whelmed with so much of kindness and so many presents. She hurried up her pace to reach home fast and then to show her mother these enchanting presents and to share her joy with her mother.

Dukhu's mother had come back from the pond after finishing her bath. She got worried, not finding Dukhu in the house. So she was looking for her anxiously all over the place. Dukhu reached the house and called aloud, "Oh ! mother ! where are you ? Come and see what I have got !" The mother heard her voice and with a great relief she rushed to her side. At once she saw the transformation of her beloved daughter and felt puzzled. Dukhu, then told her the whole story of her adventure and showed her all her presents.

The mother, then, realised that it was all due to the mercy of the old woman—the mother of the Moon-god. Her eyes became full with tears of gratitude towards the kind old soul. She felt very happy for this turn of good luck to her poor Dukhu and embraced her affectionately.

Then she took Dukhu to her co-wife Sukhu's mother and said, "Didi and Sukhu, come and see what a favourable turn of fortune has come upon us. We are no longer so very poor. The old kind mother of the Moon-god took pity on poor Dukhu and has given her so many beautiful and valuable things as presents. Are not they really lovely? I suggest that Dukhu should share her presents with her sister Sukhu. So please let Sukhu keep half of these beautiful things and the other half can be enjoyed by Dukhu."

But no doubt Sukhu's mother did not relish this good turn of fortune. She made a face and answered in a peevish tone, "Why should my Sukhu like to dress in borrowed feathers? She would not like to share the rotten objects from your beggar's bowl. You be happy with those worthless things. We do not want any share of them."

Thus scolded, Dukhu and her mother came back in poor spirits. At night, as they opened the box of cotton, a charming prince came out of it. He said, "I am supposed to be the bridegroom for you, Dukhu. Will you be my wife?"

Dukhu and her mother felt immeasurably happy. Dukhu consented at once. So they got married overnight according to the law of *Gandharva* marriage—the method of wedding celebrated simply by exchange of garlands.

Three of them, lived in the same house. Dukhu and her handsome husband rode on that flying horse daily and drank sweet fresh milk of Kapila. Dukhu's mother rejoiced seeing the happiness of her daughter. Her small house radiated happiness at last...

Now, was Sukhu's mother really sitting idle all this time—cursing Dukhu and her mother in jealousy? No, she was working out her own plan in a most secret way. She decided to send her daughter Sukhu to the mother of the Moon-god secretly. So, she also put some cotton in the sun, deposited Sukhu to guard them and then went to have her bath in the pond. A little later, wind came and blew away the cotton. Now Sukhu was indeed waiting for this opportunity! She ran after the wind immediately.



On her way, the same cow, the horse, the big Seora tree and banana tree called her. But Sukhu did not stop nor listen to them. She answered in a voice outraged—"I am going to the mother of the Moon-god, I have no time to listen to your rubbish."

She reached the white house at last and saw the old lady sitting at the spinning wheel on the veranada. At once Sukhu recognised her and approached her hastily. Then she addressed the old woman in a rough, coaxing tone, "You old woman! What are you doing, sitting here? Get up and bring me those lovely presents

which you have foolishly given to ugly Dukhu. She is a wicked girl and does not deserve any of these things. Now you better hurry and fetch me everything quickly ; otherwise I will break your spinning wheel if you delay much longer." And she actually did try to snatch away the machine from the old woman.

The mother of the Moon-god was much astonished to see the rude behaviour and harsh words of this young girl. Still she asked her to finish her bath and to have some food first and said that she could think about the presents later on. She directed Sukhu where to get a sari, towel and oil.

Hardly had she finished directing Sukhu when Sukhu jumped up and ran into the rooms. Unlike Dukhu, she chose the best sari and took the best towel. Then she took the scented oil, sandal paste and other items of toilet. With all these things she went to the pond for her bath. She carried a hand mirror also in her ecstasy.

Sukhu took a long time to apply the scented oil on her hair as well as on her body. She washed her hair seven times. She inspected herself in the hand mirror in earnest many a time. Then she took three hurried plunges in the pond.

Sukhu had heard from Dukhu that after the first dip she had got beauty and the second dip gave her golden ornaments. So Sukhu thought that more plunges she could take, the more would she get such desirable things. In fact, she could have as many dips as she liked and her gifts will increase with each dip. So closing her eyes she finished three dips to start with and then opened her eyes to see the results.

But to her utter despair what a sorrowful unbelievable sight did she see ! Her whole body, instead of becoming beautiful and loaded with shining golden ornaments, had become full of moles and ugly itches ! She could not believe her own eyes. She closed her eyes and rubbed them with the finger tips. But as

soon as she opened them again, she saw the same sickening sight.

In anger and desperation she started crying ; and lamenting loudly ran back to the mother of the Moon-god. The old mother of the Moon heard Sukhu's story, and said, "Oh ! you unlucky girl ! why did you take three plunges ? Anyway, what has happened has happened and cannot be remedied. You better go and have some food."

So Sukhu went into the dining room. There also she touched nothing but expensive delicacies like *pyaes* and 'pitals' (sweetmeats of various types).

Then she came back to the old woman and started bullying her again-- "Are you going to give me the box of cotton or not ? Wait till I reach my mother and then I will teach you a lesson."

The mother of the Moon-god said nothing at her rude remark. She only showed her the room where the boxes of cotton were deposited. Then she went on spinning silently, taking no notice of Sukhu.

Sukhu grabbed the biggest box and put it on her head as the only means of carrying it with her. Then without a word of either thanks to the mother of the Moon-god, she left the house. All her way she went on cursing aloud the old woman for her partiality. It never did occur to her that she herself should be blamed for being over greedy.

Animals like jackals, dogs and cats ran away at the sight of the horrible figure of Sukhu. Human beings fainted in fear.

The horse kicked at her. A thick branch of the *Seora* tree fell and struck her head. A big bunch of unripe bananas fell on her back. The cow chased her with her horns upturned. Sukhu ran for her life and when she reached her house she was panting and totally exhausted.

Sukhu's mother was full of optimism. Little did she imagine that her dear daughter would come back with anything but greater success than silly Dukhu. So she was waiting for her return eagerly with all the things ready, according to ancient conventions, to welcome her. She had drawn 'alpana' on the threshold of the door, had put mango leaves on small earthen pitchers full of water and set a pair of 'pirits' (an oblong low seat of wooden board) with lovely floral designs of 'alpana' drawn upon them. She had also kept a 'pradip' (small earthen lamp) ready to be lighted on Sukhu's arrival. A big white conch-shell was lying handy, to be used to welcome Sukhu and to spread the happy news in the neighbourhood with its sonorous sound.

So her disappointment at the sight of her daughter, who looked absolutely horrible with her whole body covered with itches and moles can be imagined. She could not recognise Sukhu at first glance. Was this a ghost or some other evil spirit? She was almost shocked with fear when Sukhu called her, "Oh ! mother ! See what has come over me ; unlike Dukhu, I met with rotten luck. That wicked woman was totally partial and she treated me very shabbily. She gave me neither beauty, nor ornaments like Dukhu. On the contrary, I have got all these frightful itches all over me. Oh ! do please tell me how to get rid of these beastly things ?"

After the first shock was over Sukhu's mother got back to her senses. She realised that something must have gone wrong and it was too late to regret now. But they must try to make the best of the unhappy incident. So, she said to Sukhu, "Whatever had to happen has happened. It is our bad luck that the old woman played such a dirty trick on you. But let us see if the last chance of good luck still remains with you or not. You better go into the room and open the box. If a charming prince comes out of the box of cotton, then it will make a world of difference still. Perhaps he will be able to cure you of this disease even."

So both of them carried the box into the room and waited eagerly for the arrival of the night when they could open the box quietly.

Sukhu's mother asked Sukhu to wear her ornaments in preparation to receive the prince—her bridegroom in the box of cotton. So with difficulty Sukhu had to wear the bangles, the necklace, the *male* (bangles worn on the ankles) and the *Makri*—(the earrings) on her itch-sore body. After supervising that the daughter was ceremoniously dressed to receive her groom, the mother left the room happily and hopefully. She asked her to bolt the door from inside, so that nobody could come into the room.

Next day, the mother woke up and impatiently kept on looking at Sukhu's closed door. She waited some-time longer, gradually it became almost mid-day. Still Sukhu did not come out. The mother could wait no longer. She went and knocked at the door. Nobody answered from within. She then pushed the door a little and called aloud--“Sukhu, Sukhu,—open the door. It is very late—almost mid-day meal time is over. Do not sleep any more. Open your door and come out.” But even this pleading had no effect. Nobody did answer from within or open the door. At last the mother decided to break the door open. She brought a piece of wood and with much difficulty did at last open the door. But lo and behold ! Where was Sukhu and her bridegroom inside the room ? There was no trace of either of them. Instead of Sukhu there were a few bones scattered all over on the floor. Along with those bones, there lay a skin of a big python !

Then it struck the mother that the huge box must have contained this python and not a charming groom for Sukhu. When Sukhu had opened the box at night in the closed room, this venomous reptile must have eaten up her dear daughter. These bones were her last remainings.

Poor Sukhu's mother was much too over-powered by grief. After all Sukhu was her only child—her beloved daughter. It broke her heart to think that she originated this plan which had failed so miserably and brought about Sukhu's pathetic death. Had she not sent her to the mother of the Moon-god for more ornaments and wealth, Sukhu would have been alive now. Sukhu had enough of her own ornaments. So why did her mother become greedy for more? She wailed and wailed like a woman beside her senses for a long time. Then, as if not consoled with anything, she hit her own head with a stick of half burnt log and died beside the remaining bones of her dear daughter Sukhu.

• • •

THE STORY OF ITU-GOD

THERE lived an old Brahmin couple in a small village called Durgapur. They had two daughters— one was called Umno, the other Jhumno.

The Brahmin family was very poor, but the Brahmin himself was a well-known glutton. He loved to eat good food and longed to taste delicacies like Pitahs (small cakes). But his purse hardly ever permitted him to indulge in such luxuries.

One day his longing for Pithas became really uncontrollable. So he went from door to door to beg some rice molasses and coconut. It was an auspicious day when people usually, give alms, and the Brahmin had a successful morning. After securing the ingredients he returned to his hut, and asked his wife to cook pithas.

The wife started making them. The Brahmin was so greedy and impatient to taste them that he kept sitting in a corner of the house, just behind the kitchen so that he could relish the aroma while the pithas were being prepared. Each time the wife put the batter on the hot fat to make the pan cakes, there was a sizzling sound. The greedy Brahmin sat with a rope in his hand and tied a knot every time such noise came. In this way he could have a proper check on the number of Pithas, which he had no intention of sharing with anyone.

At last, he saw his wife washing the empty bowl of batter, and he knew that he had tied the last knot.

So, very happy at heart he went for a dip in the near-by pond.

In the meantime their two daughters came to the kitchen and saw the pithas arranged in a heap. They had never tasted such a thing before. So they begged their mother for some of the aromatic new food. The wife knew very well that the greedy husband would not like to share it with the daughters even. But little did she imagine that the old man had kept such close check on the number of pan cakes. She had never been able to give the children any fancy food. So she secretly gave her daughters one pitha each and warned them not to breathe a word about this to their father.

Now, the Brahmin fresh after his bath, came back with a banana-leaf in his hand, and sat for his meal in the kitchen. The wife after serving the usual food—which was nothing more than ‘dal’ and ‘bhat’ (rice), served all the ‘Pithas’ to the husband—not keeping even one for herself or the children. The Brahmin was thrilled at the sight of the pithas. As he went on eating one after another, he untied the knots one by one. At the very last, he discovered that there remained two knots still—but alas ! no more pithas ! In a furious mood he demanded an explanation. The poor timid wife had to admit that she could not resist the little girls’ request and had given two pithas to the two girls. The Brahmin flew into a rage, and decided to banish his daughters from the house.

So, he called the girls, and asked them—“would you like to visit your aunt ?”—The girls were a bit surprised as they never knew that they had an aunt. But all the same they were thrilled at the thought of travel. They had never gone out of their own little village. The chance of seeing a new place made them very happy and excited.

The poor mother easily understood how the innocent girls were tricked by the cruel and greedy father. But

she was much too afraid of the husband to give even a hint to the daughters. So she wept bitterly while saying good-bye to the daughters. She also cursed herself inwardly for the momentary weakness, in giving two pithas to the girls. But for this foolishness of hers, the girls would not have had this punishment.

The girls did not know the secret of their mother's sorrow. They consoled her by saying that they would be back very soon—and so she should not miss them much. The mother could hardly answer but rubbed her tear-stained face with the corner of her sari.

So the Brahmin left the house with the girls. They started on foot and walked the whole day. As the day light faded the girls were totally exhausted. They were in the midst of a rather thick forest when the sun set

The elder girl summed up courage and told the father—"Father we are very tired and can drag our feet on more. May we have some rest now and sit here under this huge banian tree for some time?"

The father was only waiting for such an opportunity. He readily agreed. Not only that; he tried to be over-tired now. So he said—"Of course you can sit and rest a while. You have walked a long distance, and no doubt you feel tired. I think you two better lie down and try to snatch a little sleep quickly. You can put your heads on my lap. I myself will sit down here. We will start again when you awake and feel better after a little nap."

The girls at once lay down and fell in deep sleep. When the Brahmin was certain that the girls were fast asleep, he delayed no more the fulfilment of his wicked plan. Quietly he put two bricks under the girls' heads. Then he took some 'alta' (a kind of a red colouring) from the pocket of his piran (a shirt), and just let some drops fall here and there, so that these drops could be taken as blood stains. Examining once again that everything was right he left the place and ran back for his home.

It was almost mid-night when the younger girl Jhumno woke up first. She sat up and rubbed her eyes which were still heavy with sleep. She looked for their father, but was surprised not to find him there. Then she discovered the bricks, on one of which her sister's head was still lying, and immediately became alarmed. She tried to wake up her elder sister Umno, "Didi, didi, please get up quickly and see what has come on us. Our father has really banished us in this jungle for eating those two pithas as mother said he really would if he even came to know of this. We tried to keep it a secret ; but he must have come to know about it from some source. Now, dear me, we two poor girls, all alone in this dense forest, what shall we do ?"

Umno was not so intelligent as the younger one. So she said innocently,—“Now, Jhumno, do not be ridiculous ! I am sure our father could never do such a thing even if he came to know the truth about the Pithas. But I am afraid some thing more disastrous has happened. Can not you silly girl see the blood stains all over the place ? Our father must have been attacked and eaten by a tiger while he was guarding us. Poor we ! we have lost our dear father !” She started wailing in lamentation.

Jhumno was not much convinced by her sister's argument. So she said, “But didi, if it was so, then there should not have been any brick here under our head. Do not you remember that father asked us to put our heads on his lap before we went to sleep. So how could the bricks come ? Moreover, if he really was eaten up by a tiger, then there should have been some left-over bones as well and not only the stains of blood. I am sure, our father has punished us in this way as our mother had cautioned us.” Now Umno also could not see she was wrong. But her heart sank at the thought of their being alone in a dense forest at dead of night. There would be thieves and bandits as well as ferocious animals. Finding themselves absolutely helpless, she started trembling in fear.

Between the two, Jhumno was more resourceful. So she took charge of the situation. She said, "Look didi, there is not much use weeping. To avoid danger we must look immediately for a shelter. Let us approach this big banian tree and beg a night's shelter."

So they went close to the banian tree and said folding their palms—"Oh, you good Banian tree, we are two unfortunate helpless girls, banished and deserted by our father for a small folly. If we have to spend the night here, we will be devoured by some cruel animals or killed by robbers. Would you be kind enough to shelter and hide us within your enormous trunk? We will be eternally grateful to you if you would save us tonight from the terrible dangers."

The good old banian tree had a kind heart. He took pity on the two destitute girls and opened his trunk. The girls got inside it quickly and saved themselves for the night. There was no trace outside that the huge trunk had opened up of itself, and closed again, as one piece as before.

At day-break, they could hear the chirping of birds. They waited a little for the sun to rise. Then they requested the banian tree again to open so that they could come out from hiding. The kind banian tree listened to them once again and opened its trunk to let the girls come out. They came out quickly and thanked the tree profusely for saving their lives.

The girls now started walking fast to clear out of the forest as quickly as they could. In about an hour they were out of the forest. They reached a village soon after that. The village folk, it seemed were busy in some kind of a celebration. The girls thought perhaps some one was getting married in the village and that was a part of the merry-making. Out of curiosity they asked a woman loitering near a pond who was getting married that day. The woman looked astonished and said, "No one is getting married in our village to-day. We are all very busy celebrating the 'Puja' (worship)."

Now it was the girls' turn to be surprised. That was not the season for Durga-puja which was over about two months ago. Neither was it Diwali—that too being over about a month ago. Then which puja could it be?—They asked in astonishment. The village woman answered—"But do not you know about worshipping Itu—the sun god?" The girls had not heard of this before. So they asked again timidly why Itu—the sun god was worshipped with so much pomp and mirth. The village woman told them that to get rid of poverty and to acquire wealth and happiness one needed to worship Itu.

Now, if anyone was in a desperate need of wealth and happiness, it was those two unhappy penniless destitute sisters. So they longed to please the sun god to win a bit of his kindness. They showed their eagerness to worship and told her about their helpless condition.

The village women were touched when they heard the girls' miserable tale. They assured the girls that they could indeed worship the sun-god and that would surely change their fate to a happy one.

But from where would the girls obtain the ingredients necessary for worshipping Itu? They were—penniless—so the question of buying anything could not arise. Would they have to beg from door to door? They were almost preparing themselves to do so when the village women assured them that nothing of that sort would be necessary. Each woman who was going to worship gave something to the girls from their own offerings. But they must bathe before starting the 'Puja' (worship). So the girls were asked to go to the pond and have a dip in it. They were also given two new saris to change. The girls hurried to finish their bath in the pond. But as soon as they went into the pond, strange to say, it became dry. So they could not have their bath. They came back very sullen and reported this pathetically to the ladies busy in preparation of the puja. One kind lady gave them a ring of 'durba' grass and told them to throw it into the pond—so that it would get back water.

The girls obeyed her and lo and behold the pond became full of water. The girls jumped into the pond and then came back quickly, freshly bathed and in their new clothes.

The village women gave them flowers, sandal paste, leaf of *Bel* tree, durba grass, grams, *murki* (sweet parched rice), some fruits like bananas, and oranges, earthen pitchers and some *pitani* (rice-paste) for *alpana*—to draw flowers on the ground where they would worship. They showed the girls how to make this 'alpana' on the ground—little flowers, leaves, small ornaments, grains—all showing prosperity. Then they taught the girls the mantras. So the girls performed their worship with the help of these kind folk.

It was customary to ask for this favour at the end of the 'puja'. The girls prayed for riches and wealth for each of them as well as for their poor parents.



No doubt the sun-god was touched and greatly pleased. Suddenly a prince came riding there along with his friends and followers. The party was returning from a hunting expedition, and as a result, was tired

and very thirsty. They begged the village women for some water. The women poured down water on the open palm of each of them. Umno and Jhumno also took part in pouring water from the pitcher. Umno attracted the Prince's attention immediately. The Prince liked this beautiful girl, and learning that she came from a Brahmin's family, wanted to marry her. The Prince's friend, the Premier's son, liked Jhumno for her good looks. He too was keen to marry her—Every one, readily agreed. This is how Itu fulfilled one's wishes. The village folk arranged a Pandit to perform the wedding ceremony, and the girls were married on that very night.

Next morning the Prince's party left the village happily, with the new brides. But the Prince and his friend, the Premier's son decided to travel by different paths this time. Umno was very happy to become a Queen. But so was Jhumno to be married to the Premier's son. She felt grateful to the sun-god Itu for this unexpected good luck. So she carried the small earthen pitcher of Itu in her palanquin. Umno unlike her sister, lacked humility and gratitude. She thought now that her future was certain, she was a queen, it was no longer necessary to please Itu. So she left behind her pitcher—which was the replica of Itu—before getting into the palanquin.

Apparently, the sun-god did not approve of Umno's behaviour. The track which Jhumno and her husband were following, took them through places full of mirth celebrating happy festivals—like wedding or thread ceremony or a child's 'anna-prashani' that is when the child is given—rice for the first time. On the other hand, Umno and her husband's road was full of unhappy incidents like famine, epidemic. The Prince became very depressed.

When they reached the Palace, the Queen mother was waiting ready with 'baran-dala' (this is, a basket usually made of bamboo, carrying a lamp and things which are used in ceremonially welcoming a bride, which

is a mark of good luck) to welcome the daughter-in-law. But the gold *baran dala* turned into iron as soon as she touched it on the daughter-in-law's forehead. At once she took a strong dislike to the daughter-in-law and made a grumpy face.

Jhumno's mother-in-law was waiting for her with an ordinary brass '*baran-dala*'. It became gold at the bride's touch. Naturally the mother-in-law was very pleased thinking that the bride had brought ill-luck with her.

Gradually the Prince started losing his animals and soldiers. Elephants would die, favourite horses would be stricken with diseases. At last the Prince was exasperated and convinced in his mind, that his bride had brought nothing except rotten luck with her. So he got very angry and ordered that his wife should be killed. He called his best friend—the Premier's son, and said—"Look, both you and I married the girls from the same place and at the same time. Yet I cannot understand why you are enjoying prosperity and my fortunes are going down, day by day. Can you guess the reason?"—His friend hardly knew the answer, and kept quiet. The Prince said again—"Never mind the cause, but you be in-charge and supervise that this unlucky girl is killed by to-morrow dawn. I do not want to see her face again."

The Premier's son did not know what to do. So he went home and consulted his wife. Jhumno requested him not to get her sister killed. She pressed him much to get Umno out of the palace and bring her over secretly. Then she could hide her sister in her own house and try to understand the cause of the Queen's misfortune.

Her husband obeyed her and secretly brought the Queen and hid her in their house. The Prince was told next day that his unlucky wife had been killed according to his orders.

Now Jhumno, after questioning her sister for long did find out that Umno had stopped worshipping Itu—

the sun-god. At once Jhumno spotted the reason of all this misfortune of her sister. But it was not the prescribed date or season for worshipping Itu—so she had to wait till that particular time came when she could make her sister resume the worship. For the time being she hid her sister properly in her house.

Sometime later Jhumno's maid came and said—
“There is a poor old Brahmin waiting at the gate. He wants to see you for a minute. Shall I ask him to come in?” Jhumno replied “yes”.

When the person was brought in, Jhumno, to her utter surprise, saw that it was none but her own father in a miserable state. So, she went near and asked, “Father, what has happened to you? Why are you looking so miserable and in such rags? Is my mother all right? And how could you spot my house after so many days of our separation?”

The father answered in a broken voice, “Oh, my good daughter. Ever since I banished you sisters, I have regretted it so much. We have become poorer and poorer. Now your good old mother and myself have been starving since days. So I came to beg some help, though I know I do not deserve it after the way I treated you.”

Jhumno consoled her father and assured him that there was no necessity of so much lamentation. Though the father had had banished them, still fate had brought her good luck which normally perhaps she would never had.

She looked after her father with much care. She gave him new clothes, and fed him good dishes. Then she gave him some money and requested him to go back to his own village and ask her mother to start to worship the Itu from this very season. She told her own story and the miraculous result of the worship. Her father was very much impressed and promised her that he would definitely make his wife perform the worship.

Then he bade good-bye to his daughter with thankfulness and left for his own village.

Soon the time for worshipping Itu came. It was first Sunday of December, Umno was to re-start her worship on this very day. But strangely enough, when Jhumno asked her to join her in worship, Umno replied—"Sister, I am very sorry. But somehow I totally forgot about it and when your children were having their breakfast with 'muri' (parched rice) I also took a little from their share. As one must not eat anything before finishing the puja, I cannot start on this Sunday. But I will definitely remember it on next Sunday and join you in worshipping Itu."

Jhumno was very very sorry to hear of the irresponsible behaviour of her sister. But since nothing could be done, she started worshipping alone with a sad heart.

The same story was repeated on two successive Sundays by Umno. Then Jhumno got not only very angry, but desperate also as there was only one Sunday left now. If Umno missed this one, too, that would mean losing another year. One more year she will have to be in hiding. She resolved to catch her sister on this last Sunday of the month by hook or crook.

As the night of Saturday came Jhumno went to sleep with her sister, sharing the same bed. Not only that, she secretly tied a string of her hair with that of her sister's—so that this time it would be impossible for Umno to escape anyhow.

At dawn of Sunday, she waked her sister up and jointly went to have their bath in the pond at the back of her house. Then both sisters started worshipping the sun-god together. When the worship was over, both of them felt very happy. Jhumno said, "Now I am sure, didi, your good fortune will definitely come back. You just have a little more patience and see."

She was not far from truth. In the afternoon, there came a messenger to Jhumno's husband from the Prince,

summoning him at once. He went immediately to see the Prince. The Prince said, "Friend, everywhere in my kingdom I find so much of prosperity. But how shall I enjoy it without my beloved wife. Do please search for her and get her back to me. I cannot imagine her not being alive."

This was a stunning news to Jhumno's husband. He at once took the opportunity of telling the truth how he had hid the queen in his house so long. The Prince was very happy, and cursed himself for being so head-strong as to pass such an order on the spur of the moment. He also thanked his friend for his prudence and courage. Then he ordered that the golden palanquin be sent immediately to the Premier's house to fetch the queen immediately.

As soon as Jhumno saw the palanquin, she knew what had happened. She ran to her sister to convey the good news. Both the sisters cried happily to see the turn of fortune.

Then Jhumno dressed her sister in a very beautiful expensive sari and some jewels of her own. She embraced Umno and handed over to her the small earthen pitcher of Itu. She also made Umno promise that she would never, never forget to worship Itu when it falls due every year. Thus the sisters parted happily.

The Prince was very glad to receive back his bride. He expressed his sincere regrets for being so hard on her. Both of them went to touch the feet of the Queen mother.

No doubt the Queen mother was much surprised to see Umno. She warned her son that it might mean a renewal of bad luck again. But Umno quietly told her the secret of wealth and prosperity—the renewed favour of the sun-god Itu. She also assured her mother-in-law that she would never in future neglect to worship Itu. The mother-in-law did not know this at all. She became reconciled after hearing Umno's story of worship—and said she would also join Umno in worship. She even

asked her son to make it a compulsory ritual throughout the kingdom—if it opened the gateway of prosperity and wealth.

So, hereafter the Prince and Umno lived very happily. They felt very grateful for their happiness not only to Itu, the sun-god, but also to Jhumno and her husband. But for their kind help, poor Umno's life would have been quite different.

• • •

THE STORY OF SHREEMANTA

MANY years ago, there lived a merchant in Sripur. He had no child by the first wife Lahona. So he married once again. The second wife was called Khullana.

It was surprising that though they were co-wives, they never fought with each other. Not only that they did not fight, there was plenty of love and affection between the two. They lived like two sisters really. Lahona sincerely loved Khullana like an elder sister. She prayed to the Goddess Mangal Chandi for a son for Khullana. To achieve this heart-felt desire, she undertook many types of worship.

At last Lahona's prayer was answered. "Chota-ban" Khullana was expecting. Lahona was so happy. She constantly looked after Khullana's health and comfort.

One day the merchant called Lahona and said, "Look, I have decided to start sailing for purposes of my trade. My boats are ready for departure. I shall start early morning tomorrow"

Lahona hesitated a bit, and then answered, "But why do not you wait a little more? Would not you like to see the face of your new born baby before you start?"

The merchant replied, "No, I think I cannot delay any longer. My trade will suffer then. You are here, so I know you will be in-charge of everything—Chota-ban will surely be well looked after. I have nothing to

worry and no cause to postpone the voyage and let my business suffer."

Next day at the crack of dawn the merchant started sailing for Ceylon with seven boats full of merchandise.

Some days later a bonny child was born to Khullana. It was a boy. Lahona was the most happy person to rejoice at the happy event. She named the boy Shreemanta—the handsome one.

Though both the wives waited eagerly for the return of their husband, there was no news of the merchant. At last people started guessing various things concerning him. Some feared that he must have been drowned. Some others said that he was killed by robbers. The wives felt miserable, but did not know what steps could they take. They looked at each other helplessly and prayed to God for the merchant's welfare.

At last news came that Shalibahan, the King of Lanka (Ceylon) had made the merchant a prisoner.

Shreemanta grew up to a boy of five. So the ceremony to start learning, '*Hate-Khari*', was observed. It was the Basanta-panchami—the spring festival day in Bengal. The Goddess of learning, Saraswati, was worshipped on that special day. Boys and girls wore dhoties and saris dyed in yellow colour. An earthen image of Saraswati was placed on a wooden '*Jal-Chouki*' (a square wooden stool) heavily decorated with alpana. Children who were already studying, put their books, pen and inkpot at the feet of the Goddess. Some placed their musical instruments, like sitar, also. The beginners appeared full of excitement, each with a new slate and long thick chalk in his hands, there, in front of the Goddess. They were taught how to write their first alphabet by a Brahmin who had a good reputation for learning. Then, all together they recited some verses participating in the worship, offered a handful of flowers as offerings, and prayed to the Goddess that they could study properly and in due time become learned persons.

Shreemanta also learned his first alphabet in this conventional way.

Then Shreemanta was admitted to the village primary school—the '*Pathsala*'. Lahona and Khullana sent him to the school and then the whole day looked eagerly for his return.

One day, after some time the boy came back with tears in his eyes. Lahona took him to her lap, dried the stains of tears tenderly from his face, and asked affectionately what was the trouble with him.

Shreemanta said, "Mother, tell me the name of my father and where he has gone. My friends said such bitter things to me today. They insulted me badly".

Lahona caressed him and wept. Then she told him the whole story of the merchant who was supposed to be a captive in Ceylon.

Shreemanta heard every word with attention. Then he heaved a sigh. At last he said, "Mother, you must permit me to start at once for my father. Unless you agree, I would neither touch any food nor sleep.

Lahona and Khullana were so shocked by the little boy's resolution that they did not know what to say. How could they allow a small boy like Shreemanta, who was the apple of their eyes, to start on such perilous journey? They tried their best to dissuade him, argued long about the dangers on the way, but could not make Shreemanta change his mind. At last, finding no other way, Lahona had to agree. As a measure of safety and precaution, she caught hold of a faithful boatman and put him in charge of the sailing expedition. Seven boats were fitted out as trading vessels. Shreemanta was a trader's son—so he must travel as a trader himself.

On the morning of his departure, Lahona, Khullana and all village women gathered on the bank of the river Poorna where the boats were waiting for Shreemanta to bring good luck. Lahona put a mark of sandal paste

and '*dali*' on Shreemanta's forehead. The sound of conch-shells and loud '*hullu-dhwani*' filled the place. These were the traditional ways of expressing best wishes for a '*Shuva-yatra*'—safe journey.

As Shreemanta touched the feet of his mothers in the final leave-taking, Lahona wept and embraced him. Then she said, "My son, never forget to pray to the Goodess *Mangal-Chandi* daily. God forbid, if you ever see any trace of danger at any time, pray by taking her name, and I am sure, she will come to your rescue."

Shreemanta agreed and said, "Yes, elder mother, I shall always remember your wish. Then the boats started. The boatmen sang aloud to the Goddess of the rivers and the sea, and the Lord of winds so that through their blessings, the voyage could be safe and prosperous. Lahona and Kiullana gazed at the boats till the slightest bit of them was visible. Then both of them turned back to the house weeping.

On that very night they dreamt that the goddess Mangal-Chandi was saying to them, "Do not get worried for Shreemanta unnecessarily. He would come to no harm."

Shreemanta was proceeding smoothly. One day he forgot to say his prayers. As it happened that very day one of the boats ran into treacherous current and sank.

Another day, the sky became pitch dark with clouds. A severe storm started. It looked as if Shreemanta, with all his boats, cargo, boatmen, would be swept out by the gale. A thought flashed in his mind and Shreemanta started praying to the Goddess Mangal-Chandi aloud. Gradually the storm stopped, the sky got cleared, a rainbow came out on the smiling sky and all were saved from the imminent danger.

When they came very near to the shore of Ceylon, Shreemanta suddenly observed an amazing sight. A beautiful girl was sitting on a lotus on the surface of the

water. She was catching two elephants in both hands, swallowing them whole, and again bringing them out whole alternately.

Shreemanta bowed to the girl, thinking her a symbol of the Goddess Mangal-Chandi. The boatmen also looked puzzled at such an unusual sight.

Embanking at Ceylon, Shreemanta went to the King's court. The King asked him to take his seat. Then he asked Shreemanta, "Have you come across any unusual sight at sea?" Shreemanta, answering the king's question, described the scene of the beautiful girl on the lotus.

The king got furious to hear this. He said in an angry voice, "It seems that this boy also is trying to make a fool of me. You better put the prisoner's hard cuffs in his hands." He looked at his guards.

Then he addressed Shreemanta—"Can you show me this sight which you have witnessed yourself?"

Shreemanta answered at once, "Yes, Maharaj, I can. Why do not you come out with me?"

So Shreemanta accompanied the King to the seashore. But it was surprising that the King could see nothing. He called Shreemanta a liar and a fraud and ordered him to be killed immediately.

Poor Shreemanta's young heart sank at this brutal order. He had come in the hope of finding out his long lost father. Now, there was no question of meeting his father. Perhaps he would never even be able to meet his beloved mothers again. He felt miserable. Then he saw a ray of hope suddenly—why did not he pray heartily to the Goddess Mangal-Chandi to get him out of this awful danger.

So he requested the hang-man that he should be given a little time to say his last prayers before he would be killed. The hangman agreed and Shreemanta prayed with all his heart to the goddess.

The goddess was moved by little Shreemanta's sincere prayers. She took pity on him and resolved to save him. She appeared there disguised as an old woman and said, "Why, my poor boy, why are you weeping so much ? Come and sit on my lap."



When the hangman did strike his axe on the head of Shreemanta, to his puzzle, he observed that the victim's head remained unhurt while the axe broke into two parts. He ran to the king to give this extraordinary news.

The king got very annoyed. He started with a band of his soldiers to inspect the scene personally.

Just as the party reached the place, the old woman uttered something in an angry voice. Immediately a number of ghosts appeared on the spot and started killing the king's men.

The king now became rather frightened and sensed something super-natural dominating the place. So he began to plead to the old woman in a helpless way.

The old woman said, "Oh king, why did you want to kill that poor boy?"

The king replied, "The boy told me a great lie, so I wanted to punish him properly."

The old woman said again, "No, the boy told you the truth, you are a sinner—a great sinner. So you could not see the sight which the boy had actually seen himself. Now, I order you—go back and release this boy's father at once. Not only his father; release all the other kings whom you have kept prisoners. Then I would like you to get your daughter Sushila married to this boy Shreemanta. He is a very good boy and well deserves the hand of your daughter."

The king remained dumb-founded for a while. Gradually he understood this person in the disguise of an old woman must be none but the goddess herself. So he sat down at the woman's feet and said in a pleading voice, "Oh, my dear mother! I would obey you in everything. But I beg of you for only one kindness. Please, goddess, be kind to me, and let me see you in your true form as Kamale-Kamini (the woman in a lotus) just once as you have appeared before this boy."

The old-woman said, "All right, go to the same place and you will be able to see the same sight as Shreemanta did." She disappeared immediately after saying this.

The king rushed to the sea-shore again with Shreemanta. This time, also, the King could see nothing of that glorious sight. He started feeling very upset, when suddenly an idea did strike him. Why did he not make Shreemanta—the goddess's favourite boy, sit on his lap? Perhaps then he would be able to have glimpse of the goddess. So he asked Shreemanta to sit on his lap and as he did so, the king could see the goddess on that lotus at long last!

The king was overjoyed. His happiness knew no bounds. He felt very thankful to Shreemanta and said,

“My son, but for you I would never been able to achieve this wonderful experience”.

He brought back Shreemanta to his palace and ordered immediate release of his father, the merchant, and all other kings whom he had kept prisoners since long. The merchant could hardly believe his eyes when he was told this was his own boy. He hugged Shreemanta with all his affection and blessed him heartily.

Then Shreemanta was married to the king's daughter—Princess Sushila. The ceremony was observed with proper grandeur and mirth. There was illumination for one whole week and a continuous banquet for ten days. No one in Ceylon was excluded from taking a part in this enjoyment.

When the time came for the young couple to take leave, the King arranged a number of boats, all full of gorgeous presents for them, for the bride's in-laws, especially for the two mothers-in-law. So the merchant, Dhanapati, started the return journey at last in his son and daughter-in-law's company.

As the boats touched the shore of Dhanapati's village Sripur in Bengal, people stared curiously. They were astonished to see the merchant back alive, along with her young son Shreemanta. Some ran to Lahona and Khullana at once carrying happy news of their arrival. Lahona and Khullana rushed to the ghat.

Both Lahona's and Khullana's happiness was beyond measure when they saw their long lost husband back with dear Shreemanta, the apple of their eyes. They greeted the bride most warmly. The ceremony to welcome the bride—'Baran'—was performed meticulously. Conchshells from almost every house started sounding loudly. Along with that the sound of 'hullu' mingled and gave a warm reception to the bride.

Then Khullana walked ahead of the couple, and went on spilling a little water from a silver pitcher all the way along that path, sprinkled with fresh water.

Shreemanta with his bride advanced with Lahona. The merchant came behind them.

Lahona performed a thank-offering ceremony to the goddess *Mangal-Chandi*. All the village folk were invited to take part in the worship and then to have 'prasad'—a share of the food offered to the goddess. Everyone came to know the story how Shreemanta and his father were saved from all perilous danger by the mercy of the Goddess.

Hereafter, the merchant lived happily with his two wives, son Shreemanta and the daughter-in-law Sushila.

• • •

THE STORY OF BASANTA AND HEMANTA

LONG LONG ago there lived a king in Bengal. He had two queens. One was known as Duorani--the queen who was the King's favourite. The other, who was not much liked by the King was known Duorani--the queen towards whom the King had an apathy. No doubt Suorani, being the King's favourite, used to dominate the whole household. Poor Duorani had hardly any voice in anything. She used to feel very sad over this partiality in treatment. But as it was not within her power to change or remedy the circumstances, she suffered silently.

But in one matter she did score over the Suorani. Suorani had no issue at all, whereas Duorani had two handsome boys called Basanta and Hemanta. It was a thousand pities that they were not looked after properly. The step-mother used to deny them good clothes, even good food. Their mother was helpless and could do nothing better for them. So the three, of them, together, got accustomed to the ill treatment of the Suorani. They never could complain even.

One day both the queens went to the river for their bath. Suorani, in a rare mood of benevolence, suggested that she would put oil on Duorani's hair. Poor Duorani was puzzled by this sudden kindness; but she felt happy also. So she sat and relaxed while Suorani applied oil on her hair.

Now, along with the oil, Suorani also applied some magic ointment on Duorani's hair, though poor

Duorani was totally ignorant of this trick being played on her. As a result of the application of this magic ointment, Duorani got transformed into a green parrot, and flew away! The Suorani came back to the house and spread the story that Duorani had got drowned while taking bath in the river.

Both Basanta and Hemanta wept bitterly when they came to know that they had lost their mother. Then gradually they consoled each other and dried each other's eyes. The whole kingdom looked as if it had turned lifeless suddenly.

The Duorani who had become a green parrot flew to another kingdom. The King of that kingdom noticed the new bird there and showed it to his only child, little Basantilata. The girl became very keen to catch it. She caught the parrot and kept her in a golden cage. So this became Duorani's fate.

After sometime Suorani started having children. She had three sons by and by. But all of them looked so thinny-winny. They were nothing but a bundle of skin and bones. It seemed that they would fall down if the wind touched them. Suorani was very sorry to see the condition of her sons. In vain she tried to improve their health by giving them good food like milk and plenty of butter. Their health remained unchanged inspite of the rich diet they had. Side by side, their step-brothers Basanta and Hemanta lived on coarse food and were almost half-fed. But all the same they looked chubby and healthy. Suorani envied them like anything. But that did not help in improving her own sons' health.

At last she became exasperated and could tolerate the step-sons no longer. One day when both the brothers came back from their school, she flew into a rage. She bit her own sons, smashed a few glasswares, threw down books from the shelves and started shouting at everyone. Poor Basanta and Hemanta could not understand why she had developed temper suddenly without any cause. They stood back silently.

But the maid saw that the queen had to be pacified somehow. So she went to the King and reported the matter to him.

The King came and asked the queen what was the cause of so much fury ? The queen answered, "Those two boys, my step-sons, have become so cheeky that they abused me like anything. I would never forgive them. I would bathe in their blood."

The King passed an order that the two boys be killed and their blood brought to the queen. The hangman came, and though both Basanta and Hemanta wept bitterly, he tied their hands and feet with a rope and took them out of the palace.

The boys were taken to a thick jungle. Then the hangman took away their princely dresses and handed over a pair of coarse clothes to them to wear. Then with tearful eyes he said, "Oh ! my princes ! What could I do ? I was helpless. I had to obey the King—your father. So I tied you up so cruelly and have brought you here. But I have seen you two grow on my lap, I could not bear to kill you. You have changed your dress. Nobody would be able to recognise you as princes now. You two go away from this place. You will be comparatively safe from detection in the forest also. I will go back and meet my fate now. May God bless you both."—The hangman departed after this. On his way back he killed a jackal and a pup and took their blood to the queen. The queen bathed in that blood. Then she sat for her lunch with her three sons in a happy mood.

Basanta and Hemanta started walking ahead. The forest seemed endless. They thought they would never be able to get out of it. At last they felt exhausted and sat down under a tree.

Basanta said, "I am very thirsty. But where could we get some water to drink ?"

Hemanta answered, "Yes, we have covered so much distance. But there was no trace of water anywhere.

Well, you sit and wait here. I shall go in search of water."

So Basanta kept on sitting there and Hemanta went in search of water. After proceeding a' little ahead Hemanta saw a pond. But how to carry the water from here to his brother? He had no vessel to keep the water. Suddenly an idea flashed across his mind, he could soak the 'chadar' (the wrapper) which covered his chest. So he took out his 'chadar' and went into the water to dip it well.

Now, as it happened, the king of that part of the country had died sometime ago. He had left no issue either. So the problem arose as to who should inherit the throne. The citizens could come to no agreed solution. At last they decided to tie up the throne on the back of a white elephant. The elephant would roam about from place to place and would pick up a person who had the mark of a King (Rajtika)—on his forehead and bring him to the Kingdom on his back. The citizens would then acknowledge him as the rightful King of that land.

When Hemanta was soaking his wrapper in water the white elephant was standing nearby, unnoticed by Hemanta. It noticed the mark of a King on Hemanta's forehead and approached him immediately. It lifted up Hemanta from the water with the help of its trunk and set him on the throne on its back. Then it ran towards the King's palace. In vain did Hemanta try to prevent him from running, or to get down from its back. The elephant was much too powerful to be controlled by him. He wept to think that his little brother was left all alone in that dense forest. He shouted for help. But that was of no avail. Nobody answered him.

Basanta sat alone for a long time. Then he thought Hemanta's return was overdue, but still there was no trace of him. Finally he got up and went in search of his brother. He searched all over the place but could find Hemanta nowhere. At last night fell;

Basanta was much too tired and overspent. So with bitter tears in his eyes he fell asleep on the rough ground.

The next day at dawn one sage came to bathe and worship at the pond. On his way to the pond he saw a handsome young boy lying asleep on the ground. His heart melted with pity and kindness. He lifted the boy tenderly and brought him to his hut.

As soon as the white elephant reached the palace gates, the citizens along with the ministers and courtiers and other officials bowed down to him with reverence. Then all of them declared Hemanta as their lawful king and vowed lifelong allegiance to him. Hemanta felt puzzled. He missed his brother very much. He worried about poor Basanta who was left alone in the midst of the jungle absolutely unprotected.

But time is the best healer. So Hemanta gradually stopped bothering about Basanta. Also, he became much too occupied with his royal duties. He had to go to many shooting parties. Not only that but he had to go out fighting with some neighbouring Princes either in self-defence or taking the offensive to acquire new territory. His days became much too full to think about his past life.

Basanta was growing up under the affection of the sage. He would fetch water or wood from the forest for the sage. He plucked fruits from various trees for the sage. Every morning he collected flowers with which the sage worshipped his deity. Basanta used to listen to the Shastras read aloud, and see the different rituals performed by the sage. So his days also were passing by quietly—though it was a completely different life from that of his brother. There remained no point of contact between the brothers—once so close to one another. Memory is a tricky thing. It starts fading if unused for a long time. So did it happen in the case of Basanta

too. He almost forgot that he ever had a past which was a different sort of life.

Suorani took her sons to the sea beach one day. They were bathing and swimming in the sea. Suddenly a big wave came and washed all the three of them away. Suorani cried and shouted helplessly. But the sons never returned. Not being able to control her grief of losing three sons at the same time, she herself also drowned in the sea.

Basantilata, the little princess who had caught the green parrot and put it in a golden cage, was no longer a child. She became a beautiful young woman as time passed and was nicknamed. It was time for her to get married. But where could one find a suitable groom for this young beauty? The king, her father, arranged a 'Swayamber Sava' for this purpose. It was to be an assembly of princes invited from different places to present themselves in front of the princess as her eligible suitor. When all of them had taken their seats in the special hall, the princess would appear there with a garland in her hand. She had to walk from one end to the other of all the rows of the princes sitting there, chose one of them as her fiance and put the garland on his neck as a mark of her selection.

So, to Basantilata's Swayamber-Sava also, the princes came from different places begging for her hand. Basantilata was getting ready to appear before them. She parted her hair carefully and then combed it. She applied 'kajal' in her eyes, and 'alta' (red colour) on her feet. Then she smiled and asked the parrot who was in her room, "You dear little bird, please tell me what else I need to dress up properly?"

The bird answered, "If I were you, I would have worn golden anklets with sweet jingling noise."

So the princess opened a small silver box, took out a pair of anklets and wore them.

The bird, then, said, "If I were you, I would wear

a pea-cock blue, brocade sari with gorgeous 'anchal' (paller—one end of the sari) and golden border."

The princess opened her wardrobe and wore a pea-cock blue Banarasi sari with heavy gold work on it.

The bird now said, "You will look lovely if you wear a seven string pearl necklace fitted with diamond pendants"

The princess obeyed the bird this time also.

Then the bird said, "Do not you know princess that without a pair of long earrings, a small nose-stud of diamond and a nose-ring of ruby a woman's dress is always incomplete?"

The princess wore all these ornaments and thought now at last she must have finished dressing with the bird's full approval.

But the bird again said, "Do not you know, princess, that an ornament for the head is indispensable for a woman? Put on a pearl tiara on your hair where you have made the parting."

The princess wore the decoration on her hair also.

Then the bird sang, "Oh, my dear Princess Rupabati! You are really an exquisite beauty as your name indicates. On you the ideal jewel would have been Gajamukta, that rare pearl which grows on the forehead of rare elephants. I say, what sort of a prince has come to beg your hand that he did not bring this obvious presentation for you?"

The princess was startled. Gradually she supported the bird's idea. No one was good enough for her unless he could secure this invaluable gem as a present for her. She declared this intention to her father and said that she would not appear before the princes who had come without this. She changed her Banarasi sari, took away all the jewels she had worn and sat resolute in her room with the bird near her.

When the King came and told the awaiting princes about the new resolution of her daughter, they were dumbfounded at first; gradually they collected their wits and decided to secure this rarity anyhow. '

So all of them started towards different directions in search of an elephant on whose forehead this gem wed or shone. But nowhere was it found. Some said that the elephants which live at the sea coast, sometimes possess this rare gem. So some princes dashed for the sea-coast. Some of them lost their lives in this sad pursuit. But the gem remained unobtainable.

Before taking up this adventure, the princes vowed that they would spend the rest of their lives as slaves of that kingdom Rupnagar if they failed to find the gem. So they had to return to Rupnagar to keep their vow. They remained in that city like slaves.

These news about the failure of the great Swyamber-Sava and the fate of the princes who had come to attend the function, reached Hemanta. He became very annoyed to hear this news. He thought it was much too heartless for a girl to treat so many princes like this. So he besieged Rupnagar.

There was a big tree under which the sage's hut stood. A pair of birds lived in that tree since ages. They were called 'Bengama' and 'Bengami'. One day they were talking between themselves and were overheard by Basanta who accidentally-sat under that tree at that time. Bengama narrated the story of the failure of the Swayamber-Sava of the princess Rupabati of Rupnagar and wondered what was going to happen ultimately.

The Bengami answered him by saying "Why, the answer is quite simple. You know the mountain of frozen milk called '*dudh pahar*' situated on the shore of '*Khirsamudra*' the ocean of cream. On that Khir samudra water there is a large golden lotus floating on the milk water. At the heart of this lotus is seated a white elephant. This elephant possesses the priceless gem on its head."

The Bengama replied, "Yes, I know where the gem exists. But I am only worried that who would be able to reach it and how would he reach it?"

The Bengami answered, "Why, I am sure some brave prince will find it out some day and marry Rupabati as a reward"

Basanta crept out from the place where he was sitting. He asked, then, "Oh ! my good bird, I will try my best to fetch the gem. But I require your help in this matter since you know all about the gem and where the gem is at present. Would you be good enough to help me and direct me properly how to get it ? I shall be eternally grateful to you if you would do so."

The birds answered, "Are you really serious about it ?"

Basanta said, "Yes, I am mighty serious about it. I would like to start at once if you consent."

The Bengama said, "Then go to the sage and ask for his trident."

The Bengami said, "After that you go to that Semul tree and ask for dresses. You can start after you have been properly equipped for the expedition."

Basanta went to the sage, told him the story of the Bengama and Bengami, begged for his trident and his approval to start in quest of the gem. The sage blessed him, gave him his trident and wished him luck in his expedition. So Basanta took leave from the sage.

Basanta, next, approached the Semul tree and said, "Oh ! good Semul tree ! If you have the dresses suitable for my expedition to fetch the "Gajamukta" (the gem that resides on the forehead of an elephant) be kind enough to give it to me with your good wishes too."

The trunk of the Semul tree opened in two parts quietly, and there, inside the tree-trunk, Basanta found a dress like regal robes and a crown. He took them all

out, changed into the new dress and proceeded on his journey with the trident in his hand

He had to cross many a hill and many a river. He passed through a number of dense forests. He crossed a number of countries. He went on travelling thus for twelve years and thirteen days altogether. On the thirteenth day of the thirteenth year he reached the place of his heart's desire—the milk-white mountains with its gorgeous snowy peaks. Many fountains and springs were coming out from this milk-hill, and the water of each one of them tasted as delicious as milk.

But that ocean of cream remained on the other side of the mountain. So Basanta had to cross that mountain. When he got on to the peak of the mountain, he could get a full view of the 'milk-ocean' at last. What a glorious sight it was, Basanta thought! The 'milk-ocean' was full of lotuses. In the midst of them there was a golden lotus—the most exquisite looking one. Inside its petals, at the heart of it, sat a milk-white elephant who was playing with ocean water with its trunk, by sprinkling the water all over. On its forehead was a beautiful gem—the 'Gajamutka'—whose rays were radiating over the whole place like delightful and soothing moon-light.

Basanta could wait no longer. He had no patience to climb down the hill to reach to the ocean and the mountain. In his ecstasy he jumped from the mountain peak into the ocean—aiming to lodge himself right on the elephant, with his trident tightly caught in his right hand.

But a magical thing happened just as he touched the head of the elephant with his trident. In a wink there remained no trace of either the ocean nor the elephant. All that present was only a beautiful golden gem.

Then the lotus asked him in human voice, "Oh! my brave boy! You must be a prince. Tell me the name of your kingdom."

Basanta replied, "I am no prince, I live in a forest as a foster-son of a good and kind sage."

The lotus said, "All right ! You please put the gem on your turban and pin me up at your lapel—I wish you all happiness life long. May the princess Rupabati marry you and live with you ever after."

Basanta did as he was asked to and then started for the return journey.

Suddenly a voice said, "Oh Brother ! Please be good enough to take us also with you."

Basanta looked and saw three small golden fish were lying at his feet. One of them had made the request to take them with him so he took the three of them with him.

King Hemanta went out for shooting. The whole day he chased a deer, but could not get it. At dusk, he felt tired and sat under a tree to rest.

Suddenly he recognised the place as familiar. Yes, the tree was much too familiar. It was no other tree than the one under which his brother Basanta and he as a child sat to rest once before. Basanta was thirsty; so he went to get some water for him. Then he met the elephant and was separated from his dear little younger brother forever. God knew what happened to that kid thereafter. It was doubtful whether he still lived somewhere or was killed by some animals on that very day. Hemanta heaved a long sigh of grief. He blamed himself for leaving that child alone in the forest. Had he taken Basanta with him, perhaps the elephant would have picked them both up, and they could have been together even now. He felt very sad, and sat quietly for sometime in a mood of reminiscence. The familiar environment caused a nostalgia for his beloved brother and the mother who had left him even earlier still. At last he shed a few drops of bitter tears and felt a little relief. Then he got up and went to his tent, pitched nearby for shooting. That night

he dreamt Basanta as a young boy, standing beside him and saying, "Dada, (elder brother), please do not fret anymore. No harm did come to me as a result of your leaving me that day. So please do not blame yourself for nothing. And, look ! what I have brought with me !" He showed Hemanta a golden cage in which there was a green parrot.



Hemanta startled as he awoke from his sleep and looked bewildered. It took him a few minutes to realise that he was not actually seeing his brother, Basanta, but was only dreaming about him. The dream made him even more sad, as he became convinced by this dream that Basanta must have been dead long ago. As he still accused himself for the loss, and now death of his brother, he decided to do a penance.

He would go back to his kingdom the very next day and would shut himself up in a closed room without any food or drink and with no contact with anyone at all. He would not even see the sun or the moon. Perhaps this will make the feeling of the burden of

guilt in his mind lighter. So he returned to the palace next day and bolted the door of his bed room with clear instructions that no matter what happened, he must not be disturbed for a complete week.

Basanta appeared at Rupnagar with the 'Gajamuta'. The king received him warmly and became very happy to learn that this pleasing youth had really brought the present of his daughter's much cherished desire. When Basanta asked for the hand of Rupabati in marriage, the king felt crest-fallen. He said in a depressed voice, "Young man, much that I would have loved to give away my daughter to you in marriage, I am afraid I have not got the power to do so at present. My kingdom has been besieged by King Hemanta since more than twelve years."

The name Hemanta sent a vibration in the youth's heart. He missed a heart beat. Could it not be the same Hemanta who was his brother? Anyway, he thought of visiting this Hemanta's kingdom, even on some trivial pretext. So he said, "I am going to him to ask him to raise the siege at once. If I come back successful in my mission, I must have your daughter's hand without any further excuse. Please promise me that."

The King promised that he would definitely do so and Basanta left the place.

Basanta then reached Himaninagar—the Kingdom of Hemanta. The citizens rushed to see the handsome stranger youth who had a brilliant gem attached on his turban. They asked who he was, from where had he come and why did he come to this place. Basanta said, "I would like to meet your king first and then answer all these question in front of him. In the meantime you might go and report to him that a stranger named Basanta, has come here with a 'Gajamuta'. And here are three gold fish as a present for your king. You better take them to him."

Basanta handed over the fish to one of them who would do the messenger's job. The man took the gold fish and went to report to the king.

The King heard about the stranger. The name Basanta made him remember his long lost dear brother again which made him sad. Nevertheless, he said he would see the youth and asked him to bring the boy there. He also sent the fish to the kitchen-maid to prepare them for cooking.

When Basanta was presented to the King, neither one could take his eyes off from the other, nor believe that what they saw was really true. At last it was Basanta who took courage, broke the silence and shouted to the King Dada, (elder brother).

Hemanta could sit still no longer. He left his throne and ran to Basanta. In a moment both the brothers were embracing each other with tears in their eyes and smiles on their lips.

Hemanta, then, said, "Could it really be true that you, my dear brother, are still alive, and have come back to me at last? Or am I dreaming again at day-time? I had given you up as absolutely lost forever, and I have never forgiven myself for leaving you alone that day foolishly. What good thing have I ever done in life to deserve this good fortune of getting you back to me at last. I cannot thank my stars enough!

Then the brothers sat quietly in the King's chamber and told each other about the course of their lives ever since they had parted in the forest. Since none of them was actually a loser as a result of the separation except that they had always missed each other, they became reconciled to their fate.

In the meantime something strange happened in the kitchen! As the maid started to cut the fish into pieces, all the three fish started saying in a human voice "Oh! maid, please, do not cut us into pieces. We are the brothers of your King."

The maid got so frightened to hear that a fish could talk, that she cut her thumb due to nervousness. Then she left all the fish there and rushed to the King to give this strange news as quickly as possible.

The King and Basanta also were much surprised to hear the maid's version. The King ordered her to get the fish there. As the maid brought them to him, the King took one of them in his hand. In a moment the three gold fish took the shape of three young boys—Hemanta and Basanta's step-brothers! They touched the feet of both the elder brothers and then said, "Dada, we are the wretched sons of your Suoma. please forgive us and our mother who did you so much harm. We will live like your life-long slaves."

Hemanta blessed them and made them sit beside him. Then he asked about their father and mother, and learnt that the King, their father, and their Suoma lived no longer. They had died long ago. So all the five brothers wept a little remembering the distant past.

At last Hemanta said, "But now I am really very happy to get back all of you to me. We must concentrate on Basanta's wedding without any delay. I am sending message to the King of Rupnagar that I am withdrawing my siege of the kingdom at once, so that there may not be any difficulty to arrange the wedding of the princess."

The queen's parrot sang in her golden cage, "My brave boy has brought the priceless present at last" The princess heard this and said with a smile on her lips "Not yet, my pet, not yet."

Just then her maid appeared and reported that a handsome youth, called Basanta, had come with the Gajamukta.

The princess felt very happy. She asked the maid to arrange the bird bath quickly. She decided to give the bird a bath herself.

So two small 'pirahs' (low wooden seats) of silver and gold were brought there by the maid. She also brought a silken towel and oil in a silver cup. The princess then took out the bird from the cage and started giving it a good bath.

And suddenly she realised that there was no bird at all—instead she saw a beautiful middle-aged woman sitting opposite her ! She was very much taken aback by this sudden change and thought this must be some goddess in the form of a woman.

So Rupabati touched the elder woman's feet and then looked at her questioningly.

But the older woman embraced her and said "God bless you, my daughter, you have brought me back to life at last. May you be rewarded amply in life by kind gods for this good deed. Now, listen, my girl, I am your poor would-be mother-in-law."

Rupabati's surprise was beyond measure now. Could it be true what this good lady was saying ? How was it possible ?

The Duorani, who was no longer a parrot, made Rupabati sit on her lap and told her the whole story of her life. Rupabati, then, was convinced that this lady was the mother of the King Hemanta who had besieged her father's kingdom; and Basanta, the handsome youth, who came with the Gajamukta to marry her, was her second son.

Then Rupabati told her father that since it had been decided that she would marry no one except the prince who would get the 'Gajamukta' she considered herself as the betrothed of this youth Basanta who had done the miraculous job. Let there be no delay to arrange the wedding.

The wedding was performed without any loss of time. This time Rupabati's beauty shone to its best advantage as her dress touched perfection with the

gem Gajamukta shining in the middle of her sithi the ornament on the hair.

But when the time came for the bride and her groom to depart, Rupabati told her father that she would like to travel in a separate palanquin alone and would not share it with her bridegroom. As this was very unconventional, the king hesitated. At the same-time, he did not feel like going against the desire of his only child—much loved Rupabati.

Rupabati provided a suitable excuse for her whim. She said that she had made this promise to Lord Shiva, a long time ago, while she used to perform her daily worship in the morning.

So there was nothing to prevent her from travelling separately after this very convincing excuse. The beautiful silver palanquin arrived with paintings of floral designs all over it. Rupabati took leave from her parents with tears in her eyes and got into the palanquin. Along with her she made the Duoma, who had been hiding in her room all this time, slip into the palanquin without any body noticing this. Basanta also got into his own palanquin. Both the palanquins advanced side by side.

At last they reached Himaninagar where Hemanta was eagerly waiting to receive them. The whole city was gay and full of mirth as it was celebrating the wedding of the King's brother Basantakumar.

Basanta came out of his palanquin and then opened the door of his bride's palanquin so that she might come out too. The princess came out of it, but not alone! Another lady, very good looking but much advanced in age, also got out of it and said, "My sons, where are you both? Please come near me and let me have a look at you. God bless you both, and especially my good daughter-in-law from whom I have got this privilege of seeing you all once again."

Puzzled, Hemanta and Basanta could hardly believe their eyes as they saw their own mother, who was supposed to have been drowned ages ago, standing in front of them and addressing them. The Duoma rushed to her dear boys and embraced them with all her affection. Tears of happiness were streaming down on her cheeks.

Their three step-brothers were standing a little distance away so long. Now they also advanced to Duoma, touched her feet, and said, "Duoma, we three are also your wretched sons. Your heart has always been full of the milk of human kindness. Would not you forgive the wrong which was done to you by our Suoma? Would not you accept us as your sons? We have no mother."

Duoma embraced and kissed them one after the other, and said, "Of course you are my darling boys, and there is no question of forgiving you or accepting you. It was written in my fate to suffer, and I do not hold anybody responsible for that—not even your Suoma. So how could I have anything but plenty of love and affection for you all—my darling sons? Do please fret no more."

So at last it ended all very happily. Duoma lived as a good mother with her five sons and the good daughter-in-law very happily. The sons and the daughter-in-law loved her very much and always looked after her comforts. They also sought counsel and advice from her whenever any difficulty arose.

Whatever suffering she had to bear in her early life, Duorani was amply rewarded in the latter half of her life. She was much loved and respected by all as long as she lived. When time came for her to go to the other world, she bade good bye to everyone with a happy smile on her face and left this world. Everybody wept and missed her greatly.

THE STORY OF THE GOOD TIGER

IN a village called Chandanpukur on the edge of the Sundarbans in West Bengal, lived a family of seven brothers. It was a big Hindu joint family in the traditional ways of old Bengal. The whole household ran beautifully according to those customs and conventions which traditionally governed such big joint families.

The old grand-mother, who was still alive was a lady of about ninety. She was supposed to be the nominal head of this family. She was a widow herself. Due to old age she almost retired from the responsibilities of running the house daily. Her only son, the father of the seven brothers, died some years ago. But his wife was still alive. Though she spent most of her time in doing her 'Puja'—worship of God and deities—still she was in charge of the management of the house. She ordered her seven daughters-in-law about for various things and they carried on their work daily as the mother-in-law wanted. So there was peace in the house. Everything went on in a routine like manner. It was a well regulated house.

Now, one of the features of this house, as in any other well-run house of this type, was that the daughters-in-law sat together for their meals in the last batch after everyone else had finished taking food, daily at night and during the day. But at daytime the pressure of work used to be more. So they felt eager to finish their lunch quickly and then to hurry to their rooms to snatch some rest—a small 'siesta'. In

the evening, their work was lighter. So they felt fresh and were in a chatty mood at dinner time.

Seven of them would go on talking among themselves endlessly. The gurgling noise of their laughter, in a hushed voice becoming the daughters-in-law of the house, could be heard from the other side of the kitchen wall as they had their meal in the kitchen at night. Each would come out with some kind of a story or a joke. Sometimes they would tease one of them in a fond way. But mostly they talked about their own parents and brothers and sisters. They missed their old home of childhood and so found pleasure in talking about that cherished thing 'Baper-bari' (father's house). This house to them was the 'house of in-laws' or rather the house of the father-in-law—the 'Sasur-bari' where various restrictions, and formalities did exist

One such night the seven sisters-in-law were talking to each other in a great lively mood. They had spent a most exciting day. It was autumn in Bengal—the month of September when the rains were just over and the cloudy sky, incessant drizzling alternating with down-pour, no longer appeared to one's heart. The sky looked blue once again. Nature seemed to be radiating peace and happiness. Fields were full of ripe harvest—mainly paddy; the river Ganga was full. Dazzling sun-light played on its waters. This was the season for the greatest festival of Bengal—the Durga-puja—the time for worshipping the goddess Durga.

To celebrate the puja, it was the tradition that everybody wore new clothes. There were exchanges of presents, especially of new dresses, in Bengal at this time. Parents must send new saris to their married daughters to the house of their in-laws. The children who were unmarried also had their share of presents from their parents. The rich distributed clothes to the poor who had no means to buy for themselves, or had no near and dear ones to buy presents for them.

Presents had come to this household on this day from the parents of almost all the daughters-in-law. So they were greatly excited and were discussing the gifts. With the presents, in charge of the gifts, a relation had come from each house. So the eldest daughter-in-law, Bara ban said, "I am so happy to see my father after such a long time ! It is almost ages since I saw him last—that would be about a year ago."

Then she asked the second sister-in-law—"Mejo ban, who came from your father's house ?"

The Mejo ban replied, "My dada (elder brother) came this time. I was thrilled to see him"

In this way six of them talked of their relations who came to see them with the puja-presents in the morning. Suddenly they noticed that Chota ban the youngest sister-in-law did not open her lips. She was not looking particularly happy also. So Bara-ban asked her in a kind voice, "Why, Chota ban my dear, you are very silent to-night ? You have not even told us yet who came from your father's house. Do please tell us now."

Chota ban heaved a small sigh. Then she said, "Didi, (elder sister), do not you know that I am an orphan since childhood ? So who would come to me, you think ? I have no brother or sister even. The only relation I had was an uncle whom I called 'Begho-mama,' even he did not come this year. I do not even know whether he is dead or alive. So I had neither any present nor any relation visiting me this year. This is why I am a little sad."

Now, as it happened, a tiger was roaming on his night's errands in the dark lanes of Chandanpukur. He came in search of some rice-garner and leftovers at the back of this kitchen and heard every bit of this conversation. He felt sorry for Chota ban, and wanted to do a good turn to her.

With this intention he came over to the front door of the house and knocked hard. As the mother-in-law's room was nearest, she heard the knock first, and got up

to see who could be knocking at the door so late at night. She opened the door and lo ! and behold ! a huge big tiger was sitting on his tail right in front of her ! Poor lady tried to shout for help, but in her terror, she could not utter a word even. She felt fainting only.

But the tiger did her no harm. He said, "Beyan ! (mother-in-law of my daughter), I am an uncle of your Chota ban. I have come to take her to my house for a few days with your permission. If you agree then I would like to take her with me to-night and bring her back before the Puja starts next week "

The old lady just did not know what to say. But she gathered up her courage and said, "It is so kind of you to come and say so. Let me ask my sons and my mother-in-law and only then I would be able to give you my answer. So, will you please wait a little ?"

The tiger agreed to wait there. The old lady rushed to the rooms of her sons and told them what had happened. Then all of them got together in the Granny's room and consulted what should be done.

The old grand-mother said, "I think, since the tiger has come, it would not be possible to resist him. If we say 'no' to his proposal, he would at once be offended and in his anger will kill you all. On the other hand if we agree to send Chota ban with him, he would kill her most probably. But it is better to surrender only one person to him than the whole house."

The grand-sons also thought that she was talking sense. They had no alternative but to surrender Chota-ban to him.

So the mother-in-law went to the kitchen and broke the news there. Every one was stunned to hear that a tiger was waiting at the door to take Chota ban with him. Poor Chota ban started shaking with fear. But she was left with no choice. So she had to accompany the mother-in-law to the front door where the tiger was waiting.

The tiger looked at her and said, "My good niece, I have come to take you with me to my house. Please sit on my back, hold around my neck tightly with both your hands and then close your eyes. Please do not be afraid and we will reach our house very soon."

Poor Chota ban summoned up all her courage not to faint right then. She did as she was asked to do.

Once she mounted on the back of the tiger, he took a big jump. Chota ban thought this must be the end of the world !

The tiger took three long jumps to reach his dwelling. It was a cave amidst the forest. Then he asked Chota ban to open her eyes and to get down. She did so without a word and knew that her time was up now. No doubt the tiger would eat her up now.

But the tiger did nothing of the sort. He looked at her face for sometime, and then asked, "My niece ! How do you think I look ?"

Chota ban took courage in both her hands and answered in a trembling voice, "Oh uncle ! I think you look wonderful !"

The tiger felt pleased. He asked again. "What do you think about my eyes ? Are they any good ?"

Chota ban said, "Uncle, your eyes are just like the petals of a lotus. They are very attractive."

"And what about my nose, my niece ?"

"Ho uncle ! Your nose is just like a flute as sharp and nice, I think you have a very pretty nose."

"And how do you think I smell ? Do I stink, my niece ?"

"Oh my good uncle, no, never ! Surely you do not stink. On the contrary, far from stinking, I think you smell as sweet as sandal."

The tiger was really pleased now to get such rare compliments. So he asked lastly, "What do you think about my mouth ? Is it much too big ?"

"Oh uncle ! Surely not. You do not have a big mouth at all. I should say your mouth is almost as small as a 'panuti' fish (a small fish like sardine)."

The tiger was immensely pleased with the answers. He said, "You are really a good girl and a kind-hearted person. I should see that no harm should ever come to you. To-night you rest here and sleep peacefully. To-morrow morning I will get you nice eatables and other presents which you would like, I am sure."

Next morning the tiger went out alone towards the market. As soon as he reached the market the shop-keepers became panicky at the sight of him. They shouted "A tiger, a tiger" and ran away leaving there shops full of goods. The tiger paid no attention to their flight. He moved from one to the other deserted shop and collected sweets, saris, alta, sindoor and ornaments and other presents for Chota ban. When he could carry no more, he turned to get back with his back loaded with presents.



Chota ban could hardly believe her luck. First of all it was strange that she had survived in the

company of the huge man-eater. Now she was given all these presents by the tiger. She did not know what to do. However, she thanked the tiger profusely and expressed her gratitude. This pleased the tiger more.

Next day the tiger took her back to Chandanpukur. Before starting he said, "So my niece, you are no longer sorry, I hope, that you have no relation to visit you or to send you presents. I shall always look after you and bring you presents before every Puja season."

Chota ban thanked him again heartily for so much kindness and consideration. Then the tiger carried her back.

Her in-laws were so astonished to find her still alive. They had thought that she must have been eaten by the tiger that very night. Their surprise reached the limit when Chota ban showed them all the lovely presents she got from the tiger. Everyone in the house rejoiced at this happy ending which was far from their expectations.

But the third sister-in-law became rather jealous to see the saris and ornaments. She envied Chota ban much. She also decided to play a trick to obtain those lovely things herself.

Next year, before the Puja, while all the sisters-in-law were talking about their visiting relations and the presents they brought, this jealous girl started telling a lie. She said, "I have got no one to visit me or to send me any present. I had only one uncle, called 'Begho-mama'; but he also has stopped visiting me since last year."

As it happened, the same tiger was sitting beside the kitchen wall that night, too. He heard everything and then came to the front door and knocked. This time also, the mother-in-law opened the door. But she was less frightened this year.

The tiger said, "I have come to fetch my niece, your third daughter-in-law. Kindly permit her to go

with me. I shall bring her back soon." When the mother told 'Sejo ban', her third daughter-in-law, about the tiger's intention, she became ecstatically happy and readily agreed to go with the tiger.

So the tiger brought Sejo ban also on his back to the cave. Then he asked her, "My good niece, please tell me how do I look."

The Sejo ban said, "Oh Uncle ! you look much too horrible."

The tiger became grave. He asked again, "What do you think about my eyes ?"

Sejo ban answered, "Oh ! my goodness! your eyes look awful like rolling fire-balls"

The tiger asked again, "And what about my nose?"

"It is as flat as anything."

"And how do I smell ?"

"Oh ! you stink so badly. I am already feeling sick to sit near you."

The tiger was very angry by this time. But still he thought he would give her one more chance. So he asked, "What do you think about my mouth?"

Promptly did Sejo ban answer, "It is as huge as a pond. Perhaps you can swallow a whole man or an animal."

Hardly did she finish her words when the tiger roared in anger. He had reached the limit of his patience. He had never thought that anybody could be so unkind and selfish. So he jumped on her and ate her up—though not in whole, but in parts.

There finished the Sejo ban who never returned to her in-laws' house with any present at all.

